

# SEARCHING FOR THE DIGITAL FĀGOGO

A Study of Indigenous Samoan Storytelling in Contemporary Aotearoa Digital  
Media

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Media

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## Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Amy Jane Tielu \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

This research analyses the manifestation of fāgogo – an indigenous form of Samoan storytelling – in the digital media of Aotearoa. It argues that digital media and their associated frameworks have the potential to supplement historical fāgogo practices, nurturing cultural identity through connection in the diaspora. This is pursued through the analysis of storytelling designed to interweave the strengths and historical principles of fāgogo practice with principles of digital storytelling designed for participation.

This research builds upon the available literature of fāgogo with a contextual review conducted by Talanoa with eight scholars and practitioners of fāgogo across Samoa and Aotearoa. This enabled the development of working classifications to analyse digital media by Samoans in Aotearoa.

Case studies of digital media found a distinct taxonomy: fāgogo told in a non-digital framework, and later digitised; and contemporary fāgogo natively designed for the online digital environment. Both categories illustrated the cultural negotiation underway at the intersection of indigenous stories with the unique challenges of a distributed, digital framework. Significantly, these case studies also demonstrated how Samoans are indigenising foreign narratives and digital social spaces to tell their stories.

This research addresses the relationship between a ‘digital’ and ‘historical’ concept of fāgogo (or as I will henceforth call it, ‘formational’) before connecting best practices found from case studies (those most in resonance with formational fāgogo principles), with relevant principles of participatory production and transmedia storytelling. Considerations of linguistic and technical accessibility, ethics and multicultural negotiation are also highlighted.



This research concludes with the proposal of five principles for a digital fāgogo – fāgogo designed natively within the digital, networked environment to fulfil formational fāgogo principles. These principles are described as 1) Su'i fefiloi (Interweave of different media), 2) Education, 3) Collaboration, 4) Conversation, and 5) Fa'afailelega (Nourishment).

Future recommendations and potential research directions are provided in closing.

## Dedication

This is for the storytellers who didn't know if theirs was the 'right' way, and decided not to stay. This is for the ones yet to come and carve out their space.

This is for my Samoans still trying to find a way home. And by 'home' I mean stay right where you are, and know you belong.

This is for the ones who've encountered nothing but bitterness in the experience of fa'aSamoa; for the ones who don't know how much there is to love, or so desperately want to learn. Even more for the ones who tried and gave up in turn.

This is for my grandparents; Lola Pat and Lolo Primus, Fauo'o and Rasela. Your life work and sacrifices set the wheels in motion for our families to have opportunities from education and a foundation of faith. You raised the parents that made me possible. I'm grateful to be part of your legacy. I hope this makes you proud.

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## Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

### Positioning the researcher

The struggle of reconciling identity is a familiar conversation regarding the tensions between self-definition and belonging. My parents come from separate countries, and I was not born in either of them. This was no great trial until it came time to visit the home countries of my parents, and I couldn't relate to the people – our families – in much of their language, customs or perspectives on life.

One common refuge and process of reconciliation was through stories. Stories were my first introduction to many cultures or new ideas, describing not only our world as it was, but as it could be. It was difficult to find heroes from my parents' cultures or accessible insights into their histories. In part, this was due to a lack of available resources while living in the diaspora.

For my Samoan heritage, it is the availability and accessibility of such stories (their subject matter and style of delivery), that I am now seeking to address through the course of this research.

Fāgogo is an indigenous form of Samoan storytelling that serves as both entertainment and education in the oral ecosystem of Samoan culture. Delivered from the earliest age of a Samoan child, fāgogo plays a critical role in Samoa's indigenous oral traditions. A way for people to make sense of the world around them, fāgogo contextualises Samoan ways of knowing, being and belonging. It provides the narrative foundations of Samoa's orators, its places and its people. It contextualises Samoan philosophy and protocols. Fāgogo is both a

historical means and method of transferring knowledge, skills, and social mores between generations. Often delivered under cover of night in the privacy of the family fale or the village malae, faifāgogo (storytellers or the conveyers of fāgogo) rarely used any reference tools beyond their memory and imagination to blend proverb, poetry, song and chant.

With the migration of Samoan communities into the diaspora, this research looks at contemporary ways that Samoans are performing fāgogo in Aotearoa, specifically in its online cultures of digital media.

### **The research question**

What does fāgogo look like in the contemporary digital media of Aotearoa?

Thirty years have passed since Dunlop (1986) studied how Samoans were journeying into written forms of storytelling to document their experiences and concerns, diversifying the historical function and forms of fāgogo. Our Samoan people have continued appropriating non-indigenous media and their associated frameworks in what Sharrard (2003) describes as a continuous experiment with our indigenous traditions. Of particular interest to this research is what is occurring at the intersection of historical fāgogo practice with digital cultures of storytelling designed for participation.

New Zealand's population of approximately 144,000 Samoans (Statistics New Zealand, 2013) boasts at least two generations that have grown up with the rise of digital cultures and online social connectivity. The connection of ethnic communities in digital environments has been enabled by the rapid growth and increasing affordability of technology in the late twentieth century. The introduction of technology designed for social connection provides an

unprecedented opportunity for remote communities and ethnic minorities to witness, co-create and share their experiences in ways that were logistically unfeasible thirty years ago. There is significant potential for distributed, autonomous networks of people to apply digital media in service of minority communities that are not being catered for in mainstream broadcasts or traditional forms of media.

### Overview of this research

The design of this research is first outlined, positioning itself within the context of research performed for and by indigenous members of a community. I discuss how I respond to the challenge that historical academic research is generally a colonial act, and how this research is designed to extend knowledge for the benefit of its community and participants (Smith, 1999; Vaioleti, 2006). Departing from a philosophical standpoint of the Pacific World View (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Sanga, 2004; Vaioleti, 2006), this research recognises the indigenously Su'i fefiloi method (Refiti, 2015; Silipa, 2008) by which Samoan communities interweave new knowledge while being guided by principles that enable us to Teu Le Vā (Airini, Anae, & Mila-Schaaf, 2010), that is, nurture the boundaries of our relations. However, knowledge and understanding is always a conversant exchange that is negotiated in Samoa's oral culture. For that reason, the research implements a methodology that blended Talanoa (Vaioleti, 2006) – a popular mode of conversation among Pacific Islanders that provides space for the consideration of new ideas and potential – and Fāgogo itself (Kolone-Collins, 2010; Purcell Sjölund, 2013; Silipa, 2008; Tui Atua, 2003). The direct methods of data collection are then discussed, followed by considerations of the challenges in this research design.



A review of the literature focuses first on the global sociocultural value of stories before highlighting their value to indigenous communities, and Samoa in particular. Through discussion of fāgogo's distinct role in Samoan culture, its function, forms and character, the research then reviews principles of participatory production (in Saifoloi, Papoutsaki, Williams, Harris, and Naqvi, 2016; Singh & Blake, 2012) and transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006; 2009a; 2009b; Pratten, 2011) that present a potential to support these characteristics.

In recognition of the Samoan oral legacies from which fāgogo descends, it was decided to expand upon the available literature to include contemporary "oral literature" on fāgogo. For this reason, the context review of this academic research includes written literature and oral testimonies collected as talanoa from Samoan scholars and practitioners. Collectively, these participants illustrate 1) a holistic perspective of fāgogo's role in Samoan society, 2) the potential in its journey towards digital frameworks, and 3) considerations for creating in such an environment.

Outcomes from this talanoaga enabled me to develop working classifications by which to identify and assess fāgogo in digital media of Aotearoa. These case studies analyse emerging uses of media and their associated framework by Samoans; a snapshot of the ways in which Samoans are indigenising tools, techniques and technologies to tell stories in varying degrees of resonance with historical fāgogo practice. The term 'indigenisation' is used in this academic research to describe the act wherein indigenous peoples will adapt non-indigenous tools, techniques and technologies (such as the written word in Samoa) for local needs and contexts.

The final discussion addresses the relationship between a ‘digital’ and ‘formational’ concept of fāgogo, and how this resonates with participatory production and transmedia storytelling in contemporary digital media in Aotearoa. Considerations of linguistic and technical accessibility, ethics and multicultural negotiation are also highlighted in this discussion.

This research concludes with the proposal of five principles for digital fāgogo – 1) Su’i fefiloi (Interweave of different media), 2) Education, 3) Collaboration, 4) Conversation, and 5) Fa’afailelega (Nourishment). A digital fāgogo will be designed natively within the digital, networked environment to fulfil formational fāgogo principles. Future recommendations and potential research directions are provided in closing.

## Chapter 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY DESIGN

Within this chapter, the design for this research project is initially summarised, presented as a diagram for reference, and each component then elaborated individually.

This search for fāgogo in digital environments of contemporary Aotearoa digital media employed a blended research design; a Su'i fefiloi (Refiti, 2015; Silipa, 2008). This interweaves Samoan and non-Samoan approaches to the construction of knowledge through the Pacific Island perspective (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Sanga, 2004; Vaioleti, 2006) of collectivism, reciprocity and respect articulated through values of Teu Le Vā (Airini, Anae, & Mila-Schaaf, 2010). The research strategy involved collecting, analysing and interpreting findings within the frameworks of Talanoa and Fāgogo.

Originally an informal method of conversation, Talanoa has since been established as a qualitative and culturally-sensitive method of collecting data foremost with Tongan participants, but subsequently employed with Samoan communities (Vaioleti, 2006). Fāgogo is a historical Samoan art form and way of rationalising the world (Kolone-Collins, 2010; Silipa, 2008) that has also been applied as a lens for analysing media (Purcell Sjölund, 2013). Both Fāgogo and Talanoa were extended and applied as research methodologies in this research. These approaches yielded highly nuanced data and demonstrated the strong advantage of a basic competency in both Samoan language and culture.

Talanoa was employed as both a methodology and a method within this research. Data was collected by myself, the primary researcher, by method of Talanoa in Samoa and Aotearoa. Participants were of Samoan heritage who were either academics or practitioners in disciplines that interacted with fāgogo as a method of entertainment and/or education. From

these Talanoa, the following working definitions were developed for the formational and contemporary fāgogo narratives and principles.

*Historical / Formational fāgogo content:* Narratives of Samoan history, custom and belief established in the indigenous Samoan oral history prior to the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1830 (Dunlop, 1986, p. 43). These specifically relate to the Samoan people's history within the contemporary nations of Samoa and what is known as American Samoa. These fāgogo (e.g. the Turtle and the Shark, Sina and the Eel) provide the origin story for aspects of Samoan culture including physical land formations, village organisations, social practices and mores, philosophical beliefs, historical events, and people. These fāgogo are likely to include or be delivered entirely in lagi (songs), solo (poems) and/or tagi (chant).

*Contemporary fāgogo content:* Contemporary narratives that do not function as an explanatory point of origin for an aspect of Samoan culture, but as reflections, commentary or speculation on life. These fāgogo may or may not include reference to Samoa's indigenous oral history and fāgogo techniques of lagi, solo and tagi. Contemporary fāgogo are found both within and beyond Samoa.

*Historical / Formational fāgogo principles:* Fāgogo is delivered in-person, orally, with the purpose of imparting some information to nurture a person's sociocultural wellbeing, imagination, and – ideally – to foster the bond between faifāgogo and audience. The faifāgogo and audience agree how the story will be delivered (with prompts to continue, or to continue without prompt until the end), the audience and the faifāgogo have the opportunity to react and adjust to each other and the story as it is being told, and an opportunity is provided at the end to collectively reflect on the understanding and meaning. Fāgogo is

highly dynamic and experimental in its narrative material, tools and techniques. It may borrow from other stories or be a rendition of an existing story.

*Contemporary fāgogo principles:* Emerging uses of digital media that are not indigenous to Samoa, but reflect indigenisation and appropriation of such media and their frameworks in service of fāgogo's historical principles.

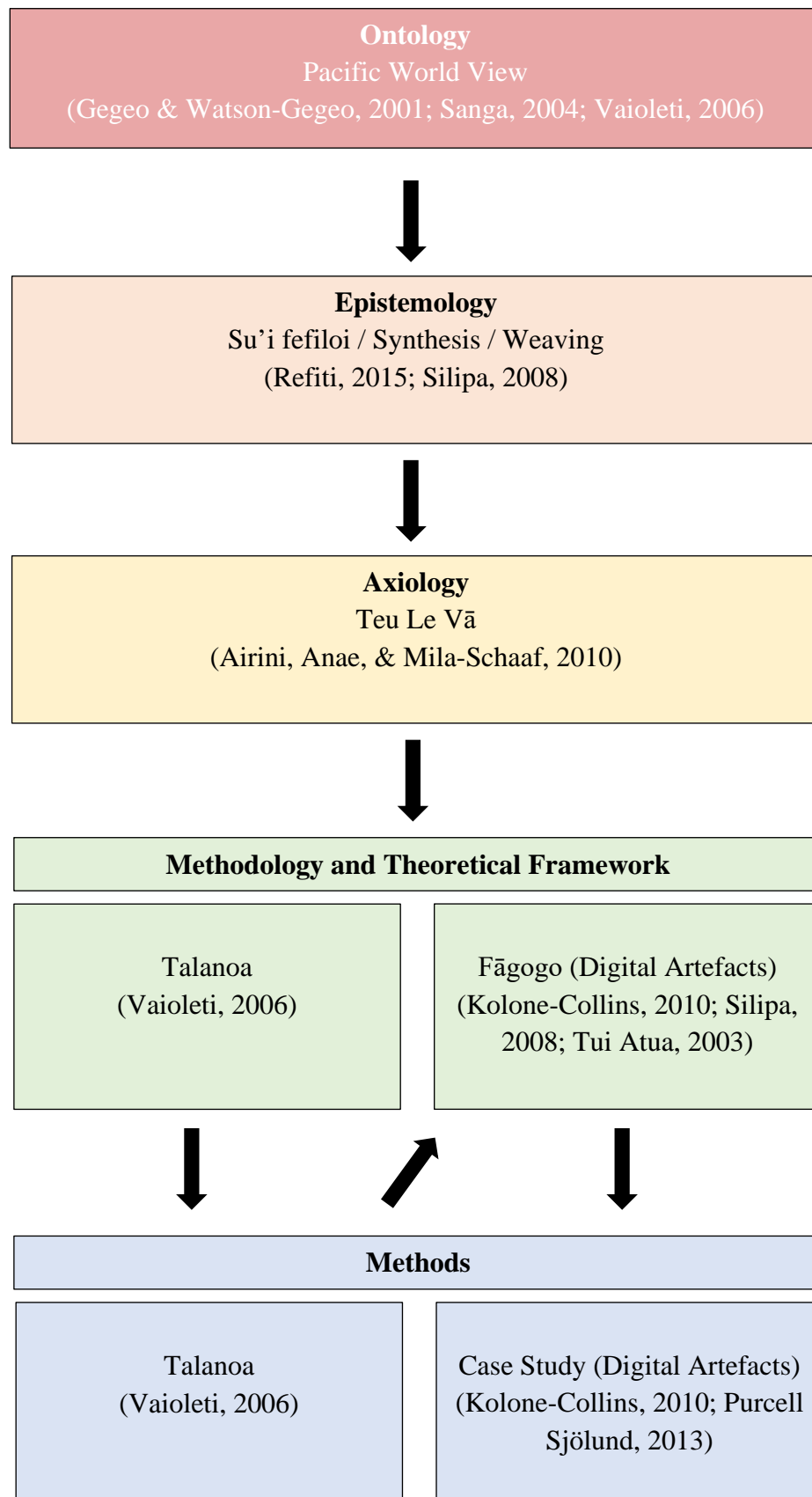
Fāgogo was applied as an analytical lens to critique and analyse digital media in Aotearoa. Fāgogo's strategy, themes and principles were used to identify, analyse and discuss digital media either written or produced by Samoans in Aotearoa.

This research was designed to recognise and incorporate both the researcher's multicultural position of knowledge construction, and the varied modes by which Samoans based in Aotearoa are congregating and telling stories online in the twenty-first century. The fluid nature of such identities held implications for the type of media these multifaceted identities create (and vice versa), the ways we use them, and what was unexpectedly brought into the scope of this research.

This exploratory, blended approach allowed the participants and researcher to consider the opportunities and implications of fāgogo's transition to digital spaces in a non-positivist negotiation, to collaboratively "help identify issues, then co-create knowledge and solutions" (Vaiolleti, 2006, p. 32). Further, it recognised that *how* people tell their stories on a subject, and *what* those stories tell are shaped by "cultural conventions and language usage ... [and] reflect the prevailing theories about 'possible lives' that are part of one's culture" (Bruner, 2004, p. 694).

The following diagram outlines the approach that was undertaken for this research project. It may inform future projects investigating the nature of fāgogo in various media, but should not be regarded as prescriptive.

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK EMPLOYED IN SEARCHING FOR THE DIGITAL FĀGOGO



## Extending knowledge and decolonising research design

When I began this research, I was often asked what I was researching, what was its relevance, how did I expect to conduct it, and why I thought I was the appropriate one to do so. As Linda Tuhiwhai Smith has warned, research will conclude at one of two outcomes: “to extend knowledge or perpetrate ignorance” (Smith, 1992 as cited in Vaioleti, 2006).

For Pacific peoples, the historical pattern of data collection, knowledge creation and theorising has been established by outside researchers gathering Pacific peoples’ stories. They then try to make sense of the stories, and retell them, from their own sense-making stances.... The researchers will become the tellers... the narrators and the persons who decide what constitutes the narrative (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 22-23).

Research undertaken without recognising and interrogating the researcher’s own point of departure, and understanding the context for whom the research is intended, will only exacerbate climates of poorly-informed outcomes. This affects the quality and, more importantly, the usefulness of research for the communities concerned. To address such concerns, Sanga (2004) suggests that indigenous and Pacific scholarly research is often of a distinctly phenomenological nature due to its culturally-specific theories of knowledge. We indigenous and Pacific researchers must identify our place in orientation to our work. We must articulate this point of departure to interrogate our underlying assumptions about the nature of existence, of being, becoming, and belonging. We must investigate both the tangible and intangible ways that our experiences are affected – and empowered – by a Pacific Island perspective (Sanga, 2004). This will enable us to consider not only what we can offer the world but, first and foremost, the full breadth of potential that we can offer our fellow indigenous and Pacific Island people (Smith, 2012 as cited in Tuck, 2013).



## Ontology of the Pacific World View

Ontology is described by Kabini Sanga (2004) as the understanding of one's social reality. This is the context-specific understanding of the nature of existence for an individual within and in relation to their community, the wider world, and the cosmos. These philosophical theses of existence, the nature of being and processes of becoming, are often organised over time into systems of spiritual observation or religion. These shape our understanding of our material reality, interweaving into the everyday customs, protocols and routines of a people. In his recount of Samoan indigenous religion, Head of State and custodian of protected cultural knowledge, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi (2009), illustrates the indigenous Samoan thesis that the supreme God Tagaloaalelagi was both creator and progenitor of all things. The distinction of 'progenitor' here underpins both the historical and contemporary Samoan belief that the relationships between all living and natural things on and beyond Earth are governed by the imperative of being kin (p. 15), "Religion permeated everyday Samoan life and... everyday Samoan life permeated its religions" (p. 25).

Indigenous research assumes that within the social reality of Pacific communities, phenomenon (perceptions of an experience) are "intangible" and "internal to people's cognition" (Sanga, 2004, p. 44). Indigenous understanding of reality is therefore subjective; it is local, fluid, and adaptive, demonstrating a belief that the nature of "truth" is relative and revisable in the face of new evidence and understanding, rather than immutable. As the time, place, and community in question change, so does the terminology and tools required of phenomenon and research. What is appropriate for research must be balanced with what is pragmatic. For the scale and scope of this research project, a qualitative approach proved the most appropriate and cost-effective for the available resources. It also allowed this research to respond to Sanga's three challenges of indigenous research (p. 45):

1. Demonstrate the depth and diversities of realities for "Pacific peoples";
2. Address the temptation to view Pacific realities in contrast or opposition to, and therefore as subsequent or primitive forms of, non-Pacific realities;
3. Retain the authenticity and autonomy of Pacific realities in light of pervasively non-Pacific research methodologies and methods, particularly the common rejection of inherently Pacific practices such as co-creation and negotiation.

My research responds to the first challenge by recognising that contemporary Pacific realities are often blended with the non-Pacific by some measure of influence. To be Pacific in the twenty-first century, particularly in a diasporic setting in contrast to your cultural heritage, is to manifest as an iteration of diversity. It is at such an intersection, an inter-weaving and synthesis -- a Su'i fefiloi -- of Pacific and non-Pacific realities, that this research takes place.

This research also responds to Sanga's second challenge of juxtaposing realities in research. A comparative lack of quantity in academic material does not equate to a lack of cultural development, sophistication or understanding, only a lack of recognition on behalf of non-Pacific academia. It is the work of Pacific researchers and inter-disciplinary research such as this thesis to address this ignorance by drawing out and recording Pacific knowledge in recognisable frameworks to non-Pacific audiences, illustrating its intersections with non-Pacific paradigms, and the ways that the two can learn from each other. This research seeks to do so through a research design that privileges Samoan concepts, methods of generating data, and negotiating knowledge. These are described in the next sections of this chapter.

Thirdly, we can respond to the notion of retaining our "authentic and autonomous" realities by continuing to increase the visibility of the diverse and nuanced experiences of Pacific

people. Kruse Va'ai states that authenticity is a problematic myth highlighting the presumption of an 'ancient' or 'original' state of culture to the disservice of its own members:

The underlying question [to discussions of authenticity] is: "What are the categories which determine the reality of authenticity of an individual or society which is heterogeneous?" All postcolonial societies are hybrid<sup>1</sup> by virtue of their past experiences which also includes precolonial contact. More crucial is the question: "Who is authentic?" Critics such as Homi Bhaba, Wilson Harris and Edward Said have advocated that such questions only serve to recapture colonial strategies which intended to separate, to divide and conquer. Moreover, in being categorised as *Other*, one was not quite right or was not quite white and conveniently never allowed to be (2011, p. 13-14).

By articulating the ways that Pacific people are expressing and storying their indigeneity, individually and together (particularly in the diaspora), we exercise the agency to collectively negotiate our realities on our own terms. We validate the integrity of our cultural norms to co-create and negotiate understanding, of encoding and passing history and knowledge through the interrogation and use of techniques such as Talanoa and Fāgogo. These methods and their content reflect not only where we have come from, but where we presently are.

I have sought to respond to these challenges for the once ex-patriate and now localised, ethnic community of Samoa in Aotearoa. My research ensured contextual awareness by inviting the Samoan community (both in the indigenous context of Samoa and the diasporic setting of Aotearoa) to shape its design, criteria of departure, and outcomes. In its early stages, this research was presented in open academic forums and feedback was obtained from academics and the public. This was conducted twice at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) through 2015, and once with the National University of Samoa in 2016. Samoan academics were in attendance and provided insight that informed the scope and design of this research.

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<sup>1</sup> Kruse Va'ai (2011, p. 13) discusses hybridity in connotations of "multiplicity, plurivocality, and impurity", and closely related to the concerns of 'authenticity'.

From the inception of this research project, I have also been informed by the wealth of academic experience from the AUT network of postgraduate Pasifika scholars whose members are researchers of Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Kiribati and Cook Island descent. This network is led by Samoan academics Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop and Fa'alāva'au Juliet Nanai-Boon.

Tuck (2013, p. 4) notes that such principles of collaboration and reciprocity are not a standard approach or commitment of most Western research paradigms. This social imperative requires that indigenous researchers depart from a distinct set of ethical criteria and, in so doing, recognise the important nuance of subjectivity for both the researcher and participants:

In a research situation in a Pacific community, the participants will behave differently depending on the age, gender, cultural rank or community standing of the researcher. These variables may significantly affect results (Vaiotei, 2006, p. 22).

The imperative for collaboration with the affected community is driven by Smith (2012) and Vaiotei's (2006) reminder that the historical act of research itself is a colonial and "disempowering" practice that has often failed to prove its worth to the communities it researches (Vaiotei & Vaiotei, 2003, as cited in Vaiotei, 2006). Indigenous researchers have thereby been encouraged to disrupt any subconscious subservience of their inherited knowledge systems, particularly when the research is about their own communities; to provoke "some revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies, and knowledge institutions play in decolonization and social transformation" (Tuck, 2013, p. xii).

Although I bear Samoan cultural heritage, Samoa is not the only heritage that has influenced my daily lived experience, my ontological position, nor the nature and processes I employ to

form knowledge. Following consultation with mentors of ethnic and Samoan academia, and open forums of both Samoan and non-Samoan academics who were invited to comment on the subject and design of this research, I have incorporated these concerns of subjectivity, multicultural perspectives and theories of knowledge into this research framework.

### Epistemology of Su'i fefiloi / Synthesis / Weaving

“E sui faiga, ae tumau le fa'avae.”

*The practices or forms may change, but the foundations and grounding remain the same.*

In their study of how the Kwara'ae rural villagers perform their Native Pacific Island epistemology, Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2001, p. 57) described epistemology as the study of how “knowledge is theorized and constructed, encoded, and passed on to the next generation”. Sanga (2004, p. 45) states that indigenous Pacific research is relativist in nature – relative to and inseparable from its context and the social realities of its people:

The ways of passing on knowledge are also particularistic. In the Kiribati context, knowledge is orally communicated by the boto. In parts of Polynesia, certain domains of knowledge are constructed and disseminated during talanoa sessions. Among the Tikopia people, key historical knowledge is danced and sung, rather than being told as a story. Within urban settings, some knowledge from the indigenous Pacific region (IPR) is now constructed and passed on through videos, camera and on websites (Sanga, 2004, p. 46).

However, the notion of universality implies a principle of “universal laws” that are only true until proven otherwise, echoing the Pacific method of renegotiating knowledge in light of new information, contexts and understanding. I will “explain, know and understand” the ways Samoans are experimenting with digital fāgogo by using “constructs, frames and metaphors that are intelligible to that knowledge” (Sanga, 2004, p. 45).

Pacific knowledge does not constrain itself by insistence that it is irrefutable. The nature of Pacific epistemologies cohere with inter-disciplinary research in their recognition of knowledge being bound to context. Knowledge is revised, augmented and negotiated with the change, blend or introduction of new contexts. It is at such an intersecting blend of Pacific and non-Pacific realities that this research takes place, illustrating how we carefully interweave paradigms and systems of knowledge to create something new: a Samoan methodology called “Su’i fefiloi”.

“Su’i” means to sew and “fefiloi” describes a mixture. This research separates the terms “Su’i fefiloi” – written with a space to identify it is an action through a process or methodology – in contrast to “Su’ifeffiloi” as it can also be written, which this research will use to mean an outcome, such as an object or art form. “Su’i fefiloi” as a process highlights the term’s application in this research project as an epistemological framework.

In Silipa’s (2008) framework of significant learning concepts and domains in Samoan epistemologies, Silipa describes the tradition of Samoan storytelling not in terms of fāgogo, but as “Su’i fefiloi”. For Silipa (2008), this provides both a holistic local and global view of the world from a Samoan perspective. Furthermore, it recognises the larger context of Samoa’s oral traditions historically surrounding fāgogo, and explicitly highlights the intertextual mode it employed as a storytelling approach:

Su’i fefiloi literally means the careful threading or stringing of different flowers together to make a beautiful ‘ula/fa’asolo (garland). Within one story there are many stories. Threading my story can be likened to filigā’afa (sinnet rigging) and lalaga (fine mat weaving), which signifies continuity and change (p. 6).

The implementation of Su'i fefiloi as an epistemological framework requires practical matters of research to be addressed. How does one design their research by a Su'i fefiloi epistemology? Compare and balance the principles and techniques of blended epistemologies? Select their participant population and sample size? Compare, analyse and interpret results?

The nature of a Su'i fefiloi is the mixture of different things to create something new, but the selection of ingredients will collectively cohere into a common outcome. In Silipa's example, a selection of different flowers collectively form the final ula lei (necklace of flowers). In Pacific Island cultures, the ula is a common gift of alofa or blessings to its recipient. In contemporary times, ula are also gifted in the form of large necklaces of money, food, or items with perceived value. The replacement of flowers with money or food (from confectionary, fruit, or entire bags of rice) demonstrates an expression of love and blessings through resources that can sustain the physical body. However, the expression of pride and intention of the gift to impart future blessings and wellbeing remains the same.

Making su'i fefiloi requires the manipulation of Samoan concepts to generate new concepts and, thus, the notion of mātau, meaning "to consider", or "to mark attentively" is important.... [It is] a way to think 'of' and 'with' theory as a 'box of tools', which, as Gilles Deleuze reasons, must be useful and made to function in such a way that the theories and concepts enacted start to construct and invent new ones (Refiti, 2015, p. 27-28).

A research design enlisting Su'i fefiloi epistemology blends more than one social reality and paradigm. It must articulate how these cohere into a theory of how knowledge is formed, and why that approach is appropriate for the research question and paradigms concerned.

A Su'i fefiloi research project is designed collectively with Samoan perspectives, concepts and contributions from members of its community. What distinguishes this style of research design, collection, analysis and interpretation from general interviews, debate and conference are not only the culturally-specific Samoan concepts leveraged but the values that drive its design, ethics, conduct and analysis (discussed in the following Axiology section).

This research project privileges Samoan fāgogo as a mode of passing and encoding knowledge. It recognises Talanoa as a culturally established mode of discourse and data collection through “a cultural synthesis of the information, stories, emotions and theorising” which is “made available [to] produce relevant knowledge and possibilities for addressing Pacific issues” (Vaiioleti, 2006, p. 1).

This research also utilises reviews of literature and independent case studies of digital media. It analyses and interprets results from a position that recognises the social realities, values and histories of both the Samoan and non-Samoan cultures that created these media.

Su'i fefiloi borrows from multiple threads of knowledge, practice and speakers as a culturally-specific practice of passing knowledge within and through Samoan generations. It is appropriate for Samoan research as it privileges the Samoan oral art, skill and historical knowledge base.

My research design creates space for the negotiation of new knowledge at the intersection of Samoan scholarship (*Context review through Talanoa*) with non-Samoan tools and techniques of research (*Context review through Literature*).



This research is an active process of synthesis enlisting the strengths of both Samoan and non-Samoan perspectives, tools and techniques.

It is my intention that this approach not only reflects the lived realities of both myself, the Samoan community in Aotearoa, and the formation of our digital storytelling cultures, but provides a defensible framework in service of empowering Samoan research.

### *Axiology of Teu Le Vā*

A prerequisite to understanding culturally specific behaviour is understanding the values that are important to its people (Sanga, 2004, p. 49). Therefore, a prerequisite to understanding the nature of how and why Samoans behave and tell stories is understanding the historical values that are commonly expressed in Samoan philosophies. The values taken into this research are drawn from the framework for research and policy collaboration in Teu Le Vā (Airini, Anae, & Mila-Schaaf, 2010); primarily that ideas, language and decision-making should be driven in pursuit and support of vā tapuia (the understanding and sacred space that must be recognised and fostered in all relations between people and their environment) and alofa fetufaa'i (reciprocity), which comes from vā fealoa'i (the mutual understanding and respect observed between people).

The establishment and sustainment of optimal relationships articulated within Teu Le Vā resonate with collaborative aspects of Talanoa. Reciprocity, responsibility, ownership and mutual respect were expressed in this research through the time and knowledge shared by researcher and participants through the research design, collection, production and review of the data. To inform the understanding of what contributed to “optimal relationships”, I

incorporated principles of the Fonofale model of Pacific Island wellbeing in the conduct of Talanoa collection, analysis and interpretation.

The Fonofale model incorporates the metaphor of a Samoan house with the foundation or the floor, posts and roof encapsulate in a circle to promote the philosophy of holism and continuity. The Fonofale Model is a dynamic model in that... all aspects depicted in the Model have an interactive relationship with each other (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001, p. 2-3).

These elements were supported through data collection by careful observation of conduct and speech in cultural protocols, while seeking to understand such elements' influence in the professional and creative decisions informing participants' theory and practice of fāgogo.

### Research methodology of Talanoa

With respect for the Samoan origin from which fāgogo's oral legacy descends, it was decided that the methodology of this research should enframe an approach that fostered the culturally-specific principles of mutual contribution and accountability between researcher and participants. This approach recognised and privileged the cultural sensibilities of its social context and participants. This research was an exploratory investigation into the transition, social potential and future implications for fāgogo's journey into new forms and spaces, and required a flexible approach and cultural grounding in Samoan protocol and precedent.

'Talanoa' is a shared Polynesian term. Foremost recognised as a means of informal conversation that occurs at many levels of society (Vaiotele, 2006, p. 24), Talanoa was initially developed by and for Tongan research practice, as both a research methodology and method of relating stories or experience without a rigid framework (p. 23). Although 'talanoa' can mean to speak in an informal way or about nothing in particular, Vaiotele describes Talanoa in a research context as a practice that "creates the space and conditions" (noa) to "holistically [intermingle] researchers' and participants' emotions, knowing and

experiences” through non-prescriptive conversations that can lead to critical discussions (p. 24).

Talanoa, in this research context, extends the familiar term from its informal usage to realms of academic debate on topics serving research across the Pacific Island community. Distinct from Fa’afaletui, another Samoan research method characterised by the collection of narratives as data, Talanoa deliberately provides space for the creation and negotiation of new and unanticipated knowledge by its unstructured or semi-structured approach. Fa’afaletui has been described as most appropriate when deliberating on a serious concern in closed group discussion, with the intention of producing a resolution, if and where necessary (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 11):

Such storying, whether deep, serious or casual, is carried out using a process that is focused on building culturally appropriate and respectful relationships, not only between researcher and participant, but between researchers themselves (p. 5).

The choice to utilise Talanoa over Fa’afaletui recognises my approach to this research topic as not a problem to be resolved, but an opportunity for fāgogo to be realised in new contexts.

Talanoa’s roots are in oratory and verbal negotiation, its nature of potentiality providing space for collaborative research. Vaioleti suggests the nature of Talanoa is instrumental for discussions that require people to be flexible and open to adaptation and compromise. This was particularly important for my research when seeking participants’ ideas on the legacy of indigenous experimentation with fāgogo’s journey to contemporary spaces.

In Talanoa, the research is contextualised by the subjectivity of both the researcher and participants (Mo’ungatonga, 2003 as cited in Vaioleti, 2006, p. 24). Unlike principles of

Narrative Inquiry, the researcher is not a prompter, but required to actively partake in the research experience. This mitigated the concern from Western paradigms that my membership in the community of Samoan storytellers and academics might have compromised the objectivity of the research. Further, unlike Narrative Inquiry, Talanoa allows for participants and the researcher to challenge one another's stories and share information (Vaiotele, 2006, p. 25). Data is thereby assessed, interrogated, clarified and adjusted between parties. Synthesis in real-time allows for collaborative knowledge building and the production of themes free of what Vaiotele terms “academic sanitisation”. Implemented as a methodology, this promotes mutual accountability and integrity of the research as an information source with investment from and for the community.

It is the sum of "tala" and "noa" that leads to the final concept. Vaiotele states that successful talanoa "holistically intermingles researchers' and participants' emotions, knowing and experiences" (p. 24), and leads to mutual "mālie", a positive state of connection and enlightenment, which is often overlooked by Western research methods and methodologies.

### Research methodology of Fāgogo

To understand fāgogo as a methodology suggests an attempt to codify what is an inherently subjective art form and process into an objective and repeatable design. However, remembering that the nature of fāgogo is Su'i fefiloi acknowledges that it will not be recognised by the same art form(s) or end product, but by its strategy, process and principles.

To this end, I incorporate fāgogo's integrative and intertextual nature by recalling Silipa's (2008) analogous description of storytelling as Su'i fefiloi – the weave, blend or synthesis.

Again, we recall the distinction here between two uses of the term: "Su'i fefiloi" to describe the act, and "su'ifefiloi" to specify the product of the act.

Following fāgogo's journey into the digital sphere, I acknowledge the breadth of exposure in this realm, and extend the Su'i fefiloi to include all the tools and perspectives inherent to this domain. To search for the digital fāgogo becomes a study of how Samoans are indigenizing non-Samoan digital tools, techniques and technologies in a su'ifefiloi, "mash-ups" or even subversions of Western storytelling conventions (Galea'i, 2005) and participatory culture. The fāgogo to be found in the digital environment will no longer be solely spoken (fāgogo tu'utaliga) or in the printed form, but embrace and be influenced by the broad diversity of voices, origins, materials, tools and techniques in this global, online forum.

In her study of fāgogo as a pedagogy for the education of Samoan children, Su'eala Kolone-Collins (2010, p. 46) identified that, with the numerous sources fāgogo draws from, it is a holistic foundation for "gagana (language), tu ma aga (behaviour), and metotia (skills) for the fa'afailelega" (nourishment) and "grounding" (p. 47) of Samoan character. Fāgogo is a conversant mode of moral instruction imparting history, beliefs, values and principles. Chief among these values is the understanding and practice of alofa fetufaa'i (reciprocity), based on the vā fealoa'i (mutual respect) and vā tapuia (sacred space between people and their environment; p. 94). Furthermore, fāgogo is a source of entertainment that can enjoy multiple versions in the collectivist and collaborative culture provided by Samoa's storytelling ethos, as indicated by the saying, "E mau'ese'ese Samoa"<sup>2</sup>. The application of this saying can help us make sense of fāgogo as a methodology by encouraging us to integrate and collaboratively

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<sup>2</sup> Each Samoan has their own beliefs and opinions (even in village stories) when it comes to traditions regarding the originality of issues regarding fagogo, faalupega, etc, all that relate to Fa'asamoa (the Samoan culture or way of life).

mediate the diverse (and sometimes disparate) impressions of understanding and scholarship on a research subject. It uniquely recognises and validates the occurrence of disparate perspectives on a subject, where there is a socially accepted provision for such a disparity in Samoan culture. This is explored more in later chapters of *Context review through Literature* and *Context review through Talanoa*.

In the search for the digital fāgogo, this research investigates stories either written or produced by Samoans in Aotearoa's digital media, how they creatively Su'i fefiloi their fāgogo, and in what ways those fāgogo address the imperative for holistic cultural nurturance of mental, physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing as described by Tui Atua (2003) and expanded by Kolone-Collins (2010), paraphrased below:

1. *Fa'afailelega*: the whole process of nurturing, caring for and nourishing a new soul;
2. *Tagata atoa*: contribution to the individual's intelligence in both Samoan and non-Samoan academics and cultural intelligence;
3. *Atamai o le po & O le po filemu*: the wisdom of night-time entertainment that provided fellowship, bonding, satisfaction and peace;
4. *Loto mālie*: the soul's mālie (satisfaction) constructed between and ideally experienced by both storyteller and receiver, where trust and respect are learned;
5. *Leo mālie*: the harmony that witnesses the fāgogo become the site of learning and revelation in pursuit of *vā tapuia* by skill of the storyteller's voice and performance;
6. *Tapu'e le fa'alogo*: recognises the skill of listening that is nurtured by fāgogo;
7. *Tapu'e lagona ma le mafaufau*: recognises fāgogo's role in nurturing the imagination and problem-solving skills through the expression and exploration of both intense emotion and riddle;

8. *To'omālie*: describes the confidence gained by the understanding of one's place and identity in relation to the fāgogo.
9. *Mafutaga ma vā fealoa'i*: highlights the significance of fāgogo as a site fostering fulfilling relationships of love and trust within the āiga;
10. *Fa'afai'ele le gagana*: points to fāgogo's importance as a source of transferring and regenerating the Samoan language and way of life.

### Research method of Case Study

The search for a digital fāgogo required the development of parameters for the selection of digital media from all online media being produced or created by Samoans in Aotearoa. The following definitions were developed from the sum of previous literature on fāgogo (Dunlop, 1986; Tui Atua, 2003; Kolone-Collins, 2010; Meleisea et al., 1987; Moyle, 1981; Purcell Sjölund, 2013; Silipa, 2008) and Talanoa with participants:

*Historical / Formational fāgogo content*: Narratives of Samoan history, custom and belief established in the indigenous Samoan oral history prior to the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1830 (Dunlop, 1986, p. 43). These specifically relate to the Samoan people's history within the contemporary nations of Samoa and what is known as American Samoa. These fāgogo (e.g. the Turtle and the Shark, Sina and the Eel) provide the origin story for aspects of Samoan culture including physical land formations, village organisations, social practices and mores, philosophical beliefs, historical events, and people. These fāgogo are likely to include or be delivered entirely in lagi (songs), solo (poems) and/or tagi (chant).

*Contemporary fāgogo content*: Contemporary narratives that do not function as an explanatory point of origin for an aspect of Samoan culture, but as reflections, commentary or

speculation on life. These fāgogo may or may not include reference to Samoa's indigenous oral history and fāgogo techniques of lagi, solo and tagi. Contemporary fāgogo are found both within and beyond Samoa.

*Historical / Formational fāgogo principles:* Fāgogo is delivered in-person, orally, with the objective of imparting some information to nurture a person's sociocultural wellbeing, imagination, and – ideally – to foster the bond between faifāgogo and audience. The faifāgogo and audience agree how the story will be delivered (with a prompt to continue, or to continue without prompt until the end), the audience and the faifāgogo have the opportunity to react and adjust to each other and the story as it is being told, and an opportunity is provided at the end to collectively reflect on the understanding and meaning. Fāgogo is highly dynamic and experimental in its narrative material, tools and techniques. It may borrow from other stories or be a rendition of an existing story.

*Contemporary fāgogo principles:* Emerging uses of digital media that are not indigenous to Samoa, but reflect indigenisation and appropriation of such media and their frameworks in service of fāgogo's historical principles.

Within Aotearoa, research into online audience activity currently lacks ethnic granularity of distinct Pacific Island groups (Crothers, Gibson, Smith, Bell, Miller, 2014; Crothers et al., 2016; Statistics New Zealand, 2013). As research highlights that Pacific Island audiences are most active on socially-networked spaces such as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *Spotify*, I searched primarily through the first two for digital media that were self-described fāgogo. I then assessed if the person publishing the digital artefact identified as Samoan, and if the artefact presented formational fāgogo content or principles. By reaching out for recommendations



from my own social networks, I was able to find popular *Facebook* group pages of Samoans telling their own contemporary stories, or sharing historical stories and knowledge that had been digitised from previous projects.

The non-hierarchical, distributed nature of these networks required me to explore related nodes of media content and content makers through creative social spaces, often doubling back to search through their respective networks. This also led me to further social media platforms such as *Instagram* and *Tumblr* where I explored their uses of hashtag subject matter classifiers.

Although the scope of this research was to focus on digital media within Aotearoa, media from the United States of America and Australia have also been included. During the course of this research, it became evident that the scope of relevance to this research was not limited to content created by the Samoan community in Aotearoa, but media by Samoans beyond Aotearoa that was being locally consumed and shared. As a result, the scope of digital media eligible for case study was expanded from those ‘created by’ to include ‘redistributed by’ Samoans in Aotearoa. The Su’i fefiloi nature of fāgogo culture recognises the re-integration, adaptation and movement of stories into new cultures and contexts. This concept is explored further in later chapters of *Context review through Talanoa* and *Case Studies of Digital Media*.

### Research method of Talanoa

Morrison et al. (2002, as cited in Vaiioleti, 2006) state that relationships form the foundation of most Pacific Island activities. Since Talanoa in-person provides participants with a human face to whom they can relate, and recognises the position they hold as members of a Samoan

community, I determined that Talanoa would be an appropriate method of collection and analysis.

Eight semi-structured Talanoa (talanoaga) were conducted in-person with academics related to the field of, or practitioners of fāgogo. The content of these talanoaga was guided by Tui Atua's (2003) pursuit of cultural nurturance through fāgogo to connect individuals to Samoa's historical values, language, beliefs and identity.

The scholars approached for this research had encountered fāgogo through their work, cultural upbringing or practice. Fāgogo was defined and discussed in formational terms of content and principles as described at the beginning of this chapter. For insight into the historical and contemporary influence of fāgogo within their fields, these eight Samoan academics were approached across Apia, Samoa and Auckland, Aotearoa. These scholars came from fields of archaeology, cultural studies, language, education, and art history:

Lealaitagomoa Dionne Fonoti, Matiu Matāvai Tautunu, Letuimanu'asina Emma Kruse Va'ai, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, Gatoloai Tili Afamasaga, Seiuli Vaifou Aloali'i Temese, Taupa'u Luatutu Fiso Evelini Fa'amoe, and Lisa Taouma.

As also found in Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea's (2014) observations with students during their tutelage of social and health research courses, the process of conducting Talanoa primarily contrasted with non-ethnic interviews in my observation of culturally specific protocols, "Polynesian/Samoan codes of respect, the need for turn sharing when speaking, the need for symbolic gestures of reciprocity and gratitude, and so on" (p. 7).

In order to identify participants satisfying these criteria, I consulted the literature for academics who wrote on the subject of fāgogo or Samoan storytelling. I also went online to find digital Pasifika storytelling projects that would identify the practitioners behind them. The involvement of participants in this latter category was justified by treatment of their contemporary projects as the latest in what Ellis (1997) and Sharrard (2003) describe as continuous experimentation with our indigenous traditions. In order to contact all potential participants, I sought the assistance of my Pasifika academic network who utilised their existing relationships to make introductions on my behalf and open discussions.

Talanoa were conducted in the order at which participants were available, with outcomes from each session informing the next (Vaiioleti, 2006, p. 26). All talanoa were conducted in a one-to-one format, with the exception of my talanoa with long-established educator and faifāgogo duo act of Taupā'u Lutatutu Fiso Eveline Fa'amoe (Fa'amoe) and Seiuli Vaifou Aloali'i Temese (Temese). All talanoa either took place in the participant's place of work or in a neutral, public location for both participant and researcher, addressing the following topics:

**Function**, explicitly the discussion of fāgogo as a mode of cultural nurturance and a site of reflection on social realities. This was negotiated through questions regarding the historical social values, belief systems, moral tales, and social conventions that pervaded fāgogo, and the role of language. Talanoa also explored the **form** of fāgogo, reflecting on both formational and contemporary Samoan storytelling strategies and techniques. This explored the placement and role of proverb (alaga'upu), poetry (solo), song (lagi), chant (tagi), myths and legends (tala o le vavau), and the role of participation.

All talanoa were recorded on a digital audio recording device and transcribed by the researcher to preserve contextual details, reference information, and to identify areas requiring follow-up with research participants. Transcriptions were then sent to participants to confirm their accuracy and completeness. In accordance with the ethics of Talanoa's collaborative negotiation (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 28), participants were also invited to use the review of transcripts and initial analysis of summaries as an opportunity to discuss, seek clarification or suggest new points on the emergent themes from our talanoaga.

As the data was collected and analysed in a comparative method between participants to identify patterns or themes, Michael Patton's caution for phenomenological researchers became apparent, that "there are no formulas for determining significance... no straightforward tests for reliability and validity..., there are no absolute rules" and only "to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent" the information yielded from all who participated in the research (1990, p. 372, as cited in Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 7).

Rather, the emergent themes were driven by the guideline of questions developed prior to talanoa and the emphasis of particular points made between participants and myself during talanoa. The findings must be read as specific to the experience and observations of those participants – those scholars and practitioners, those faifāgogo – and not as indicative of all in their past or present peers in similar practice.

A set of sample questions were provided to participants and used to guide these semi-structured discussions. These are provided in *Appendix A*.

## Challenges and limitations of this research design

Although Talanoa may assume that participants will speak a Pacific Island language, it should be noted that a competency in even basic Samoan language and culture was indispensable to the success of this research. This was particularly evident when I endeavoured to observe cultural customs and addresses of respect, demonstrating a holistic awareness of how to conduct myself in concert with the principles of my research.

Participants naturally flowed between English and varying degrees of Gagana Samoa (the Samoan language). Poetry and nuance of concepts are eroded in the process of translation. Some resources (custodians and literature) were beyond the reach of this study due to their exclusive use of Gagana Samoa.

Talanoa were all conducted in English with variable degrees of Gagana Samoa (Samoan language) arising at different times. This revealed both a challenge and an opportunity for future research and work in this field, as most cultural custodians, academic and practitioners of fāgogo are advancing in age and insist there are nuances of this knowledge that we struggled to capture in translation. This tension raises a distinct opportunity for a “natively digital fāgogo” (fāgogo designed for digital environments) to be deliberately in both Samoan and English language.

The indigenous context of Aotearoa – and the contemporary context of the community in question – has not been explicitly recognised in this research design. I regret that I neither recognised nor fully appreciated the relationship between tagata o le moana<sup>3</sup> and tagata whenua<sup>4</sup> at the time of designing this research, due to resource constraints. Future extensions

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<sup>3</sup> People of the Pacific Ocean (Pacific Island people, specifically the Samoan community of Aotearoa)

<sup>4</sup> People of the land (the indigenous Maori people of Aotearoa)

of this research might also benefit from kaupapa<sup>5</sup> and whakapapa<sup>6</sup> of indigenous Aotearoa research frameworks to consider the influence of Māori ontologies and epistemologies on the lives, perspectives and storytelling practices of Samoans now living in Aotearoa.

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<sup>5</sup> Principles and concepts

<sup>6</sup> Foundations and approaches

## Chapter 3. CONTEXT REVIEW THROUGH LITERATURE

### The sociocultural value of stories

In his treatise on the *Origin of Stories*, Brian Boyd (2009) argues that storytelling is a biological imperative unique to humans as a species, that we are the

[F]irst to offer an account of fiction (and of art in general) that takes in our widest context for explaining life, evolution; and to offer a way beyond the errors of thought and practice in much modern academic literary study, which over the last few decades has often stifled -- and has even sought to stifle -- the pleasure, the life, and the art of literature.... [to] suggest the implications of a biocultural perspective for understanding literature and life (p 11).

This research argues that storytelling is a critical component of Samoan culture for the reasons described by Boyd: it is a culturally-specific way of explaining life and the nature of change. Further, it provides a means of rationalising observed phenomena in a way that reflects Samoan philosophies about the nature of being and forming knowledge. The literature below will demonstrate how and why the indigenous Samoan form of storytelling, fāgogo, has historically performed this function. In the postcolonial era, Samoans have continued telling stories, but fāgogo has also journeyed from its documented form and its historical way of being practised.

With Samoan migration to Aotearoa and digital social spaces, the literature then considers analogies between this indigenous form of Samoan storytelling and non-Samoan principles of “transmedia” storytelling. The chapter then concludes by highlighting the benefits of storytelling projects that have included their indigenous audiences in the production process, in what this research calls “participatory productions”. It is argued that the objectives of

participatory productions align with the formational principles of fāgogo in a storytelling practice that can be both empowering and culturally-sensitive.

#### *An indigenous perspective*

Storytelling for indigenous communities and researchers enables them to contribute to a collective narrative of their indigenous culture and thereby create their place within it (Smith, 2012, p. 242). Margaret Kovach describes stories as a way of connecting to ways of knowing, that storytelling "is both method and meaning", and a central feature of indigenous research and knowledge methodologies (as cited in Smith, 2012, p. 242). In a research context, stories represent what Russell Bishop calls the "diversities of truth" (Ibid).

Oral storytelling is one particular method employed by indigenous communities to rationalise and articulate their understanding and relationship with their environments:

Oral, storytelling culture – and the vernacular intimacy with the local land that coincides with such culture – is the forgotten ground that still supports those more abstract layers of culture [the global culture of the Internet and the cosmopolitan culture of the book]. It is the neglected but necessary soil from whence civilisation still draws its sustenance, the nourishing humus in which our humanity remains rooted (Abram, 2010 as cited in Mesmer, 2016, p. 7).

This research seeks ways to reconcile Samoan oral practices of storytelling and non-Samoan storytelling frameworks, within diasporic contexts. In pursuit of opportunities to regenerate affirmative ways of knowing for Samoan communities in Aotearoa, this research focuses on an indigenous Samoan form of storytelling called "fāgogo". Specifically, this research investigates ways that historical principles of fāgogo are manifesting in Aotearoa's twenty-first century digital cultures, surrounded by new media, techniques and technologies.



“Culture” and “cultural ways of knowing” (Williams, 1958, as cited in Kruse Va’ai, 2011) within the framework of this research recognise the diversity and continuous change in the everyday experiences of past and present Samoans. This research recognises that Samoans organise themselves, practice beliefs, customs and protocols in ways that are specific to their time and context.

#### *Fāgogo: a Samoan way of knowing*

Fāgogo is a vital component in the oral ecosystem of Samoan culture. It serves as an indigenous method of transferring knowledge, skills, and social mores between generations. Serving as both entertainment and education, fāgogo nurtures creativity and are most commonly understood as stories delivered under the cover of night in the privacy of the family fale (house) or the village malae (the communal open ceremonial space or field in a village). Many fāgogo tell of Samoa’s cosmogeny and are interwoven with significant historical events, or posit a point of origin for a facet of Samoan culture:

Samoan [oral histories include] explanations of the origin of the earth and the Samoan islands, and of the origins of the chiefs and people of Samoa from the time of creation. There are many other stories which explain the origins of villages and districts, of chiefly titles, of place names, of arts and crafts, and many other aspects of Samoan culture and political life (Meleisea et al., 1987, p. 10).

Fāgogo can blend oral history, biblical material, import folk tales, render contemporary events, or be works of pure fiction (Dunlop, 1986; Kolone-Collins, 2010; Moyle, 1981). Its highly dynamic and adaptive nature is characteristic of Samoa’s oral way of knowing and rationalising the world:

In the field of rhetoric the Samoans have shown both skill and artistry. The most frequently used and best beloved embellishment of the language to which the orator resorts, is the muagagana or alaga’upu. They are proverbial expressions, mostly in

elliptically mutilated form, taken from the mythology, the history and the everyday lives of Samoan people and serve to illustrate their opinions and utterances (Schultz, 2008, p. vii).

Orators, talking chiefs or tulafale as they are natively known, are living embodiments and custodians of Samoa's formal oratory traditions. Responsible for upholding the honour and esteem of their family and village at social and formal gatherings, their art draws on the fāgogo practice:

It is the custom at important ceremonies... for the tulafale to engage in lengthy speeches and to "qualify" their points with quotations from proverbs, legends, genealogy and biblical references (Pasifika Press, 2010, p. xi).

Faifāgogo -- storytellers who convey fāgogo -- demonstrate a similar dynamism in their innovative and appropriative nature of oral practice. In contrast to the tulafale, the faifāgogo inhabit the informal, everyday space of oral traditions, using simple language, memory and imagination to blend proverb, poetry, song and chants (Dunlop, 1986; Kolone-Collins, 2010, p. 13):

Although adherence to a basic plot outline is common to all such versions [of fāgogo], variation – in the form of the narrators' idiosyncrasies – is possibly largely responsible for the continued existence and popularity of this form of oral literature (Moyle, 1981, p. 19).

While fāgogo use informal and everyday standards of language appropriate for very young children, the complexity of oratory is aimed at fellow, mature tulafale, requiring extended study and practice to be accurately conveyed and understood.

Viewing fāgogo as a key component of Samoa's oral literature, Su'eala Kolone-Collins believes that fāgogo's incorporation of other artefacts in the Samoan oral traditions such as "*tala o le vavau* [myths and legends], *tala tu'u* [stories handed down between generations],

*tala Tusi Paia* [Bible stories] and *tala fatu* [creative stories]”, allows fāgogo to behave as an umbrella term for Samoan storytelling; and “as a source of cultural knowledge, children learn about *va-feiloa’i* [social mores in conduct and behaviour between people], *fa’aaloalo* [respect and respectful behaviour], and *alofa* [love and compassion], that contribute to the essence of fa’aSamoa” (2010, p. 93). In her qualitative study on the pedagogical strengths and contemporary relevance of fāgogo, Kolone-Collins asserts that fāgogo is a critical tool for nurturing indigenous knowledge and cultural identity. In their compilation of Samoan oral traditions and legends, the Samoan Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (n.d.) support this view through the culturally-driven imperative of their work:

The major aim of this work is not only to revive myths and legends of Sāmoa but also to give the present generations some knowledge and understanding of what happened, where, when, why they occurred and who were involved. The main reason for this is because most of these legends and myths are lost and their cultural values and language use have also disappeared (p. viii).

To further illustrate fāgogo’s social imperative, Samoan Head of State and cultural custodian, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi (2003), states that fāgogo is the oral analogy of “mama”. Mama is food broken down and passed from the mouths of elders to very young children. Mama is believed to impart more than nutrition and immunity, with its intention of alofa (blessings, love) and mana (spiritual power), binding generations of families and communities through history:

"Mama" is literally and symbolically food for the young.... more than food. It is spiritual.... Mama is a metaphor that connects with the ritual of the "fāgogo", which also has the power to impart spiritual, emotional, physical, mental and cultural nurturance (Tui Atua, 2003, p. 58).

This demonstrates fāgogo’s ability to perform as both “method and meaning” as described by Kovach through fāgogo’s “sociocultural nurturance”. In the framework of this research,

“sociocultural nurturance” denotes nurturing the holistic wellbeing of a person as described by Efi and Kolone-Collins above. Fāgogo approaches this through stories that foster an understanding of the many ways in which Samoans have and continue to express and practice their culture, individually and as collectives:

Culture can be broadly defined as a way of life – the way we think, believe and behave, as well as the way we make, do and use things. Culture is the way a people express themselves – not only verbally but in dress, life style, beliefs and practices (Crocombe, 1989, p. 52).

In his documentation of approximately two hundred fāgogo, Richard Moyle (1981) considers how fāgogo functioned through the lens of ethnomusicology, reflecting on “how people perform their music and relate that to values in society” (The University of Auckland, n.d.). Moyle likens fāgogo to European folk tales: moral stories with formulaic plots to articulate social conventions for acceptable behaviour and conduct. This demonstrated fāgogo’s didactic function, but exclusively through narratives derived and delivered within an indigenous context.

However, Kolone-Collins (2010) and Kruse Va’ai (2011) observe fāgogo’s versatility in its adoption of a variety of historically-established, contemporary, religious or home-grown stories. Fairbairn-Dunlop (cited as Dunlop, 1986) writes that when Samoan storytelling adopted the written word, it was typical for Samoan writers to experiment with different narrative techniques, rhythms, allusion and poetry to recapture the indigenous power of Samoan oratory, and the immersive, intimate qualities of night-time fāgogo. Albert Wendt (Ellis, 1997) has rejected suggestions that neither this narrative philosophy nor the subsequent generations of Pacific written literature<sup>7</sup> are attempts to belatedly match Western

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<sup>7</sup> In contrast to “oral literature”.

standards of literary canon. Samoan storytelling has not “evolved” to adopt postmodern qualities of thematic and technical pastiche or intertextuality, but rather inherently possessed those qualities as a legacy of Samoa’s oral fāgogo practice.

Wendt points specifically to the strategies and historical techniques of “oral literature” that he observed his grandmother employ as she performed fāgogo during his childhood (Sharrard, 2003, p. 8). These influenced Wendt’s works to remain self-aware of their status as artefacts in a narrative ecosystem continuously building upon and in response to works that had come before (Ellis, 1997). This method bears strong similarities to the overall nature of Samoan storytelling which Silipa describes as a process of “Su’i fefiloi”:

Su’i fefiloi literally means the careful threading or stringing of different flowers together to make a beautiful ‘ula/fa’asolo (garland). Within one story there are many stories. Threading my story can be likened to filigā’afa (sinnet rigging) and lalaga (fine mat weaving), which signifies continuity and change (2008, p. 6).

Su’i fefiloi is a fundamental characteristic of fāgogo storytelling. Fāgogo as an art form and framework of storytelling principles, therefore, has the capacity to indigenise any content in service of circulating and negotiating knowledge about the character of Samoan culture. To this extent, fāgogo provides a critical sociocultural foundation for Samoan communities whether in the native context or abroad in the diaspora.

When Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop (cited as Dunlop, 1986) searched for the written fāgogo, she investigated the impact of non-indigenous media on historically-practiced fāgogo. Her study found that Samoa’s local form and function of fāgogo was moving into new modes of explicit social commentary, interrogating authority, questioning identity and culture. These were produced through short stories, poetry, novels, radio readings, serialised newspapers and

radio dramas. The first generation of audiences and storytellers to witness these changes, assessed these contemporary productions against the indigenous power of Samoan oratory:

Samoans relish the spoken word. The development of Samoan writing must be set against this tradition of language to be understood. The love of words, building up into logical argument and woven into intricate plots, allusion and innuendo, are all here (Dunlop, 1986, p. 41).

The above demonstrates important features of fāgogo that have been adopted for this research: that fāgogo was didactic, inherently experimental, intertextual, reiterative and adaptive to new media, techniques and contexts.

Although fāgogo still bears the potential to be an effective resource for Samoan children still within Samoa, these audiences are privileged by access to historical fāgogo's use of concepts, language and customs that are native to their environment (Kolone-Collins, 2010, p. 12).

However, Samoans with little or no exposure to a culturally immersive community may lack the opportunity to experience fāgogo in its historically recognisable context or way of being practised, as described by Efi (2003, 2016) and Kolone-Collins (2010). Furthermore, there is evidence that, even within Samoa, the historically recognisable practice of fāgogo has been declining for years due to language barriers, migration from historical village and social structures, cultural westernisation and the introduction of new technologies (Mesmer, 2016, p. 19-21). Samoan communities in Aotearoa manifest all of these factors, separated from their indigenous context by time and distance.

It is therefore necessary to look at locally-informed ways of practising fāgogo that also address these concerns. This research specifically responds to the introduction of new technologies.

In her study of the “Evolution of Orality in Samoa”, Cheryl Nunes (2007) insists that whatever art form Samoans choose when telling their stories, stories must remain specific to the author’s context and experience. Samoans’ stories will then accurately reflect their experiences, outside the bounds of Western standards or conventions of literacy (p. 11).

Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel are common examples of the first generation of written Pacific canon: native-born and spoken Samoans who indigenized the tool kit of the English written word for the perpetuation and decolonisation of their own traditions (Kruse Va’ ai, 2011, p. 139-141). Their work blends Samoan and English language, concepts, customs or characterisation, that manifests “a continuous experiment in generating a modern aesthetic for the Pacific derived appropriately from indigenous traditions” (Sharrard, 2003, p. 11).

Oral skills are powerful tools in Samoan society. While the formal oratory demonstrates the Samoan orator’s “ability to both adapt to and shape a social situation” (Duranti, as cited in Nunes, 2007, p. 7), the faifāgogo demonstrate the resilience of Samoan culture’s ability to appropriate and indigenise the tools of their colonisers (Kruse Va’ ai, 2011):

In the interwoven, cross-cultural texts of popular media, culture is also being produced within an interweave of local and imported traditions, influences, genres, materials and practices. Popular forms, whether they be song, dance or story, unabashedly show that portions are borrowed and mixed with local varieties. The ethnic stamp is there – acknowledging both the local elements and the appropriation process... (p. 117).

Samoan migrant writers who are not from Samoa demonstrate how cultural identity can be both established and maintained through different uses of language which are adapted in response to the cultural environment. The language belongs to the user (p. 153).

Despite these observations of fāgogo’s appropriation, indigenisation and journey into new art forms (Dunlop, 1986; Mallon, 2002; Sharrard, 2003), there is a dearth of research studying what is happening at the intersection of contemporary fāgogo and the twenty-first century

environment of networked online media in Aotearoa. Aotearoa was chosen as the site of study as I am currently based in Auckland, and Aotearoa has close historical ties to Samoa and a substantial population who identify as Samoan (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). As a function of this research in the search for the digital fāgogo, this research explores how Samoan storytellers are creating a “digital literacy” that connects to the indigenous fāgogo legacy through digital technologies, tools and techniques.

In her analysis of *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* feature film, Purcell Sjölund (2013) states that the film’s commercial and critical success among the global Samoan community was closely tied to the film’s opportunities for audiences to share and discuss their reactions in person or through *Facebook* (p. 65). Purcell Sjölund observed that the audience’s experience of *The Orator* did not end at the close of the film. Contending that the film combined established film techniques with specific fāgogo principles<sup>8</sup>, this produced a fāgogo that explored and upheld historical Samoan social values through a contemporary narrative. The film was then able to function as a mode of sociocultural nurturance, and as a trigger prompting recall of personal experiences, followed by collective celebration and negotiation of Samoan cultural identity online. This was carried out through the film’s feature page on *Facebook*, where Samoans around the world shared personal memories aroused by the film:

Many *Facebook* posts described how people told their own stories while watching the film indicating how *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* became a type of intragroup memory.... As intragroup memory, the film became a cultural product that resonated and encouraged similar memories (2013, p. 58).

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<sup>8</sup> These selected principles, originally from Kolone-Collins (2010)’s outline of fāgogo’s learning outcomes, were adapted by Purcell Sjölund to be understood as “transformative stages of both the teller and listener” (2013, p. 24): *loto mālie* or satisfied soul, *leo mālie* or harmony (only achieved if the listener is attentive to the story’s message), *tapu’e lagona ma le mafaufau* (the rewarding of an enriched imagined and spiritual world), and *to’omālie* or confidence (the stage where the listener reaches a point of knowing).



Through *Facebook*, the audience were able to discuss the film's narrative and features not only with each other, but the film's producers (p. 59):

By expressing their own fāgogo and experiences of the film, for example through *Facebook*, Samoan spectators connect to other Samoans. Since most of the stories and discussion focus on the qualities or essence of being Samoan, this organic sharing of ideas defines a global and fluid Samoan identity (p. 60).

The success of *The Orator* as a fāgogo narrative speaks to what Smith (2012, p. 247) describes as a demonstration of how indigenous communities are indigenizing the tools of established colonial environments to tell stories that create and affirm "good" relations with their Samoan communities (Ibid). These narratives humanize its members through its contribution to a global Samoan canon that diversifies the depictions of everyday lived Samoan experiences. Analogous to Smith's principles for indigenous research, the activity following viewings of *The Orator* on digitized social networks allowed Samoans to express their agency of self-determined representation (p. 252). These personal narratives were then discussed and spread around the world, connecting Samoans with other Samoans, with contemporary experiences and the lands, knowledge and customs of their cultural heritage: "Connecting is related to issues of identity and place, to spiritual relationships and community well-being" (Ibid).

Online, socially-networked platforms such as *Facebook* provide a low effort and low cost<sup>9</sup> mechanism for communities separated by time and geography to connect and combine their memory and knowledge. These platforms deconstruct most historical hierarchies for the priority of immediate communication. The potential of such social spaces to facilitate fāgogo

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<sup>9</sup> At the expense of online access and a device on which to use it.

principles of collective negotiation through storytelling, will be explored through the following themes of participatory circulation and production.

## Designing for audience participation

### At time of circulation

In the twenty-first century, the available storytelling suite has moved beyond traditional broadcast models and forms of media (the written word, radio and television). Socially-networked platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* and *YouTube* allow audiences to share and hold conversations with immediacy, increased autonomy, anonymity, and creativity through multiple forms of media. Samoans no longer need to congregate under the one fale or within the malae in the physical world to hear and share their stories.

In New Zealand On Air's study of where audiences of Aotearoa are spending their time and what they're consuming, it was found that *YouTube* is the most popular platform for digital media, reaching one in two people each week, while On Demand services reached a third of audiences (Colmar Brunton, 2014). *The World Internet Project Survey 2015* (Crothers, Smith, Urale, & Bell, 2016) reports a shift in awareness that audiences are no longer acting as mere consumers but now, also, as producers of media: 60% of participants reported they post content of their own creation, but from this group, only 17% do so on a monthly basis (p. 21). Although no ethnic breakdown was available for this data (p. 22), of those creating content for social media sites, the highest form of activity was posting messages or content (82% of participants). This nature of activity supports the observations by Purcell Sjölund (2013), that platforms such as *Facebook* are an instrumental tool for communities and individuals to share personal stories and hold conversation. Other social media activities described were posting

pictures, videos or photos (73%), audio material (13%), or participants hosting their own websites (10%).

The largest proportion of Pasifika people using the internet (62%) are classified as ‘Next Generation Users’, “Those who have accessed the internet in the past year through two or more of the following devices: smartphone/tablet/e-reader/game console/smart TV” (Crothers et al., 2016, p. 51). Participants were classified as a member of this group if they also spent time on a wireless handheld device, had access to an internet connection beyond dial-up at home, rated themselves with average internet ability, noted that the internet had at least an average rate of importance in their daily life, and therefore used the internet regularly (Ibid).

Samoans’ migration to these digital social spaces brings new opportunities for storytelling to Su’i fefiloi in the continuous experiment with contemporary tools, techniques and technologies informed by our indigenous fāgogo legacy (Sharrard, 2003). To this end, this research will focus on the contemporary principles of what Henry Jenkins (2006, 2009a, 2009b) describes as “transmedia” storytelling, a mode of telling stories that consciously takes into consideration:

... The interplay between different media systems and delivery platforms... media audiences and modes of engagement.... Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (Jenkins, 2009a).

Pratten (2011) distinguishes transmedia from multiplatform storytelling through the effort to provide a coherence or “synergy” between all media on offer, regardless of platform.

Although Jenkins (2009a) mentions “systematic delivery”, he also acknowledges this bears traits of long-established top-down thinking from broadcast media. Transmedia storytelling

must also take into account grassroots efforts by audiences when they contribute to conversations or the storytelling itself.

To connect transmedia storytelling with earlier practices, Jenkins established seven principles of transmedia storytelling (Ibid; Jenkins, 2009b). While Jenkins observes that these principles do not need to be mutually exclusive, several of them are framed in opposition<sup>10</sup>. This provides a contrast highlighting the distinct qualities of each, but I have changed the approach to reinforce that these principles do not need to be mutually exclusive. For this reason, the original seven principles are laid out as ten. While analogies will be drawn below (where possible) between these principles and Samoan fāgogo, these principles will also be discussed in relation to the digital media under case study for this research in the later *Discussion* chapter.

- 1) *Spreadability*: media that is spread by the audience, expanding its economic value and cultural worth without necessarily requiring long-term engagement (Mitell, 2009), but potentially enhancing viewer engagement and participation. This is demonstrated not only through the oral propensity of sharing stories, but in online meme culture of “#SamoanProblems” or Samoan quotes and proverbs, shared on a variety of social media platforms.
- 2) *Drillability*: media that provides greater detail and understanding by drilling deeper into the story’s world or complexities (Mitell, 2009). This is possible through the reiterative and expansive nature of Samoa’s fāgogo practice that allows the same story

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<sup>10</sup> Spreadability vs drillability, continuity vs multiplicity, and immersion vs extractability.

to be recycled, expanded, or even redirected in its focus through new storytellers and new renditions (Fonoti, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

- 3) *Continuity*: media that coheres one or more threads of story in support of a collective, continuous narrative. As asserted by Kolone-Collins (2010), the practice of fāgogo encapsulates oral suites of myths and legends (tala o le vavau), creative stories (tala fatu), Bible stories (tala Tusi Paia), and stories handed down between generations (tala tu'u). This demonstrates Samoan storytelling's ability to weave and re-negotiate continuities of narrative, and thereby forge connection, between different kinds of texts, historical events, places and people.
- 4) *Multiplicity*: media that support alternative versions or fresh perspectives of a narrative. In what might seem a contrary support of 'continuity' in Samoan fāgogo, multiplicity is a pervasive characteristic of Samoan oral culture, going hand-in-hand to create "multiple continuities":

For each story there are many versions and each version has a special meaning and importance to the people who tell it. To understand why versions of a particular story can contradict each other, it should be remembered that one function of oral traditions is 'legitimization'. This means that a story will be told in a way that explains the situation of a village, district, title, and so on.... Differing versions of oral traditions cannot be looked at as "true" or "untrue". It is more important to consider the reasons why the same story is told in different ways and why one story is 'true' for one family, village or district, but not for others (Meleisea et al., 1987, p. 10).

- 5) *Immersion*: media that allows the audience to enter deeper into the story world.

Jenkins (2009b) states that the desire from audiences for immersion was instrumental in the rise and success of the film industry, and many forms of media that followed. In the historical fāgogo practice, greater immersion and intimacy with a story world are

facilitated by the common choice to impart fāgogo under cover of night, free of distractions, at the end of the day when all other duties are completed. There is a critical time of de-briefing following the fāgogo that also allows the audience and faifāgogo to interrogate, deepen and share their understanding.

- 6) *Extractability*: media that the audience can take away or use as a resource in the spaces of their everyday life. Examples of extractability in historical fāgogo practice are not physical artefacts, but materialise through knowledge and understanding, such as moral lessons, principles, or history contained within the fāgogo. Further, the fāgogo provide the origin and context of many proverbs that guide decision-making in both the oratory customs of talking chiefs, and in everyday society.
  
- 7) *Worldbuilding*: media that collectively builds upon the detail and understanding of a story's world. In the fāgogo practice, the principle of worldbuilding is closely linked to the pursuit of immersion and extractability of oral legacies. Anyone can be a faifāgogo, and almost any detail can be reviewed and renegotiated. Therefore, anyone can potentially add to the mythos of an established canon. One important exception relates to fāgogo with an established history, village of origin, and family of cultural custodians. These fāgogo often provide an explanation for the origin of a certain aspect of Samoan culture. Due to the belief by some that such fāgogo are measina (sacred treasures) to be treated like heirlooms, or the cultural heritage of a family or village, it is unlikely that an adjusted version or new addition to such a fāgogo would be recognised or accepted into the cultural canon, if told by someone unrecognised as entitled by a fāgogo's village or family of origin.

- 8) *Seriality*: media that unfolds a story and/or story world across a series or instalments.

In formational fāgogo practice, faifāgogo have been known to serialise their fāgogo over a series of nights to ensure their audience return (Kruse Va'ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Jenkins (2009b) suggests that transmedia storytelling extends the classic serialised mode of storytelling by the option of delivering instalments of a story across multiple media platforms.

- 9) *Subjectivity*: media that enables insight into different characters, perspectives or storylines. Jenkins (2009b) states that subjectivity in storytelling allows a story to be extended in a variety of ways, such as highlighting unexplored aspects of the core narrative, broadening the timeline, or showcasing the experiences of secondary characters. This is provided in historical fāgogo practice through the multiplicity of narratives and fāgogo that focus on the experiences of different characters or events.

- 10) *Performance*: media designed to encourage or explicitly invite audience participation, enabling them to perform an action and become actively engaged in the narrative experience. These can be as explicit as “call outs” from hosts to their audience on the television show *FRESH*, or implicit in the act of sharing media on a social platform where the audience can comment and share discussions (Jenkins, 2009b). This principle can but does not necessarily mean that audience participation can affect the unfolding of a narrative. In addition to the debriefing that follows fāgogo, the invitation to perform an action is seen in historical fāgogo practice where the audience are required to prompt the faifāgogo to continue with a cry of “Aue!” (unless they have noted they will only listen). The faifāgogo tells the story organically, in response to their audience’s attention and reactions. Fāgogo audiences therefore have the

capacity to directly influence not only the nature of the narrative, but whether or not the story is told at all.

In this last principle of performance, Jenkins touches on how performance is manifesting at positions of both storyteller and the audience; the production and engagement with the narrative experience. Jenkins suggests that fans will always be seeking access points or opportunities to contribute. However, this alludes to an assumption that media is commonly released into cultures where this initiative is the standard reaction or characteristic of the audience majority. I believe such an assumption privileges the design of media for audiences with a particular familiarity of historical media practices, and whom will subsequently already possess a mature level either formal or informal literacy with digital media.

#### *Within the process of production*

In order for Samoan audiences to leverage principles of transmedia storytelling, it is necessary to understand how Samoan communities are interacting with media and already producing their own stories online. This resonates with Jenkins, Ford & Green's (2013) call for storytellers to embrace the logic of participatory culture to "create and circulate media in ways that demonstrate an understanding of and respect for audience motivations" (Click, 2013). Such an understanding will enable online Samoan storytellers to elicit Samoan audiences as producers and performers in a manner that is organic for the audience, and provides space for the growth and maturity of their own online media literacy and practices:

Culturally sensitive consultation needs to include source communities, diasporic populations, museum [archive] and cultural experts. It is only then that the Web can potentially revitalize culture, harness the power of the visual, and connect cultural objects to stories of everyday and ceremonial use and meanings (Singh & Blake, 2012).



Although Singh and Blake (2012) assert the need for online projects of cultural heritage to mindfully consult with their Pacific audiences, I argue there is a nuanced distinction between consultation and collaboration. While consultation may seek the input of affected stakeholders, collaboration empowers those with a stake to share decision-making power in a project's priorities and principles. Such productions will ensure that community collaborators are engaged and informed throughout the entire production process, in order to exercise their agency. With respect for the oral history from which fāgogo descends (empowering audiences as the next storytellers when stories were exchanged), the logic follows that participatory modes of storytelling should also incorporate participatory methods and principles of production.

In the context of this research, the definition of “participatory production” takes its cue from non-fictional “grassroots” or “citizens media” (Rodriguez, 2001), wherein projects are developed from or with key and ongoing involvement from the community who are the subjects or target audience of the project. This contrasts with long-established top-down broadcast models that observe the entry of external content creators into a community without actively involving that community in the production process or key decision-making (Harris, 2008).

Community involvement is a key element of the production process by argument that only members of a community can identify, appreciate and effectively articulate concerns, priorities or interests that the community itself deems significant. However, to bring out this consciousness, these people must be placed in positions that provide the opportunity to develop their potential and express their agency (White & Patel, 1994, as cited in Saifoloi, Papoutsaki, Williams, Harris, and Naqvi, 2016).

Extending principles from documentary practice of “participatory video”, participatory productions can perform as “a tool for individual, group and community development” (White, 2003, p. 64). They can be an empowering process of self-reflection and negotiation that helps communities foster “more inclusive and collaborative relationships” internally and with outsiders (Shaw, 2015, p. 628-9) to inspire “fresh interpretations to the way communities imagine themselves” (Saifoloi et al., 2016, p. 6).

The objectives of participatory productions resonate with the aims of this research to identify how Samoans are practicing fāgogo online in “grassroot” digital media and modes of Aotearoa. Participatory productions can consciously support the fāgogo pursuit of sociocultural nurturance online by and for online Samoan communities whose practices are informed by distinctly Pacific Island value systems. This has been demonstrated by Harris’ (2013) study of the utility of participatory video in building community, fostering dialogue and representation with rural women in Fiji. The project was delivered within a locally-defined framework that measured social capital and is summarised below by Saifoloi et al.:

The study found that [participatory video] enabled bridging links between individuals and communities; community cohesion through trust building and dialogue; capacity building and knowledge accumulation through information exchange; and community and individual representation through programme creation (2016, p. 6).

In 2016, Saifoloi et al. conducted a pilot project with Pacific Islands cultural heritage arts leaders, the Pacific Mamas in Auckland, to investigate the utility of participatory video for Pacific communities in diasporic contexts. The study found that principles of participatory video production can empower communities by providing them with the agency to self-determine and direct their own content creation:

The fact that [the Pacific Mamas] are very experienced storytellers and cultural performers enabled them to adopt the technology as another tool in their armoury of cultural expression.... When we think of the key elements of participation, facilitation and 'open' process that [participatory video] enables: the [participatory video] approach allows for a safe and creative space encouraging stimulating, meaningful and effective discourse about what is important to the lives of the participants (2016, p. 16-17).

We can measure the presentation of participatory production principles in online Samoan storytelling by analysing the roles that Samoan audiences are actively fulfilling. As the target audience and community in question, this includes their degree of influence throughout the process and on the outcome. To this extent, Samoan stories that incorporate participatory production should demonstrate active attempts to engage the audience for key decision-making to highlight what is important to the lives of Samoan communities in Aotearoa.

## Conclusions

There is a demonstrated human imperative for storytelling in indigenous communities, whether still within their indigenous contexts or in the diaspora. Stories allow individuals and communities to dream and plan for the future. Stories carry history and context, connecting communities across time and distance. Stories affirm who people are, who they are not, and who they might still become.

Fāgogo is an indigenous form of Samoan storytelling that is both a means and a method of knowing Samoan culture and identity. It historically provided points of origin for many aspects of Samoan culture and performs a vital role in Samoa's oral ecosystem. Fāgogo is also highly adaptive and dynamic, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of their faifāgogo who continuously indigenise new material and techniques in a Su'i fefiloi: weaving together a mixture of different threads and material, where stories can exist within stories. Fāgogo has

already journeyed into a variety of non-indigenous forms of media, but concern has been expressed by some that the continuation of its practice is threatened by new technologies.

This research instead suggests that Samoans are already telling stories online and emulating fāgogo principles in their online practices. This research redirects this perceived threat from new technologies into an opportunity and turns to participatory cultures of storytelling for consideration.

Transmedia storytelling (coherent narratives that can interplay with a variety of media on multiple platforms) bears strong resemblance to Samoa's historical practices of Su'i fefiloi storytelling. However, in order to render transmedia in culturally-sensitive ways that i) empower Samoan communities to self-determine and create their own content, and ii) recognise the active role of audiences in Samoan storytelling culture, this research also called for the incorporation of principles in participatory production. Participatory productions collaborate with their subjects as both audiences and producers, providing a type of agency and shared ownership that can be facilitated online through digital, social networks.

These considerations inform the guidelines of talanoaga and analysis of case studies in following chapters.

## Chapter 4. CONTEXT REVIEW THROUGH TALANOA

In the search for the digital fāgogo, it was necessary to understand fāgogo's origin, historical form and social function, before any examples could be sought and analysed. In line with the framework of this research, and with respect for the oral legacy from which fāgogo and its practitioners and recipients also descend, I engaged Samoan academics and practitioners to elaborate on the existing literature of fāgogo, and to collaboratively consider the implications of its journey to diasporic contexts of digital spaces in Aotearoa.

All participants involved in this research have encountered fāgogo in respect to other disciplines. For insight into the historical and present influence of fāgogo within their fields, eight Samoan academics and practitioners were approached across Apia, Samoa and Auckland, Aotearoa. These scholars and practitioners came from fields of archaeology, cultural studies, language, education, and art history: Lealaitagomoa Dionne Fonoti, Matiu Matāvai Tautunu, Letuimanu'asina Emma Kruse Va'ai, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, Gatoloai Tili Afamasaga, Seiuli Vaifou Aloali'i Temese, Taupā'u Luatutu Fiso Evelini Fa'amoe, and Lisa Taouma.

Talanoaga with each participant followed a semi-guided line of questioning adapted with respect for each participant's academic background, personal experience with and views on fāgogo as they emerged through the course of the talanoa. The accounts from each participant have been grouped into themes reflecting the search for and journey of fāgogo from its perceived origin to contemporary renditions within Samoa and abroad.

Participants were prompted to share and explore their understanding of fāgogo as a mode of sociocultural nurturance (Tui Atua, 2003; Kolone-Collins, 2010). This considered the social

values they might expect fāgogo to manifest, its didactic role, its relationship with language, storytelling strategies and techniques, and what Fairbairn-Dunlop (1986) described as the “pursuit of intimacy”.

Unlike reviews of literature, which require an independent critique of material, the Talanoa method of research implements the collective critique of ideas, and collaborative negotiation of knowledge at the time of collection. For this reason, the information below reflects the final account that was mutually accepted by both researcher and participant. These accounts were then compared between participants to draw out themes and ideas that were contrasting or complementary.

A full description of the guidelines used in talanoaga are provided at **Appendix A**.

### Fāgogo in the indigenous context

There was a moral lesson to it, it told about peoples’ lives, also about good and bad, and the subtleties of meaning that you have to grow in order to find substance. Sometimes they’re tricky, and they’re hard to put down in specifics, so we tend to make our point more by allusion.... We find that the meaning sometimes loses its force, or the impact because people want to nail down the specifics of something, but our meaning originates from one of the essences of our philosophy that there is a knowable and the unknowable. And the main mission of man is to identify the knowable, and to identify the boundary between the knowable and unknowable.... From the language of Tagaloa<sup>11</sup> (Tui Atua, personal communication, April 11, 2016).

Fāgogo serves an indigenous ontological, epistemological and theological mode of reflection in Samoan society. In his role as Samoa’s Head of State, His Highness and cultural custodian Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi (Tui Atua) has advocated the instrumental utility of such

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<sup>11</sup> Samoa’s indigenous creator God.

historical practices to the prosperity of Samoans in both their indigenous homeland and the diaspora. He insists that this is because most Samoan stories provide a wealth of history, culture, philosophy and theology that can be brought to contemporary global conversations.

Matiu Matāvai Tautunu (Tautunu), an academic on Samoan cultural studies, reinforces this role of fāgogo in Samoa's oral ecosystem. Samoa's ethnohistory is composed through its complement of oral traditions, genealogies (gafa), fāgogo, and an understanding of Samoa's connection with other places in and around the Pacific Ocean (personal communication, April 7, 2016). Altogether, these contextualise Samoa and indigenous foundations of social organisation, and provide a comprehensive construction of village identity.

Tautunu illustrated that ethnohistory of this kind is considered measina (sacred treasure) that custom dictates must be earned by custodians recognised by the village or district. These custodians are required to understand that the cultural artefacts are to be nurtured and protected from exploitation or manipulation.

Writer and academic on education, Letuimanu'asina Emma Kruse Va'ai (Kruse Va'ai), observes that fāgogo's didactic nature characterised certain ways of speaking and turns of phrase that have formed a sub-language within Samoan culture. Over time, such turns of phrase became either commonplace idiom or proverbs. Such subsets of language play an important role in a person's repertoire of cultural and intertextual literacy when navigating their native stories and stories of other cultures; distinguishing or likening boundaries of the self from the Other by identifying both common motifs and features.

Both Tui Atua (personal communication, April 11, 2016) and Kruse Va'ai (personal communication, April 7, 2016) stress that it is critical to understand the origin of many of

Samoa's idioms and proverbs, any fāgogo that birthed it, the context in which the fāgogo came into being, and the intention behind its delivery, in order to apply them appropriately.

### *The etymological origin of fāgogo*

Tui Atua enframes his understanding of the fāgogo's earliest intentions within the social fabric of Samoan society. By looking to the history of Samoan language and its intersection with other languages – in particular, Tongan – Tui Atua's etymology takes root in the notion that "fāgogo" is a shortened version of both "fa'agogo" ("like the 'gogo", the white tern seabirds) and "fafaga gogo", meaning "to nurture like the gogo(sina)". The gogosina are valued in Samoan culture not only as a source of food but for the use of their feathers in indigenous methods of fishing and decoration:

They're very good for making the bait, stick it onto your fishing line. They're very much part of our cultural life. There are beautiful chants about the bird with the long tail because that was the most valued (Tui Atua, personal communication, April 11, 2016).

The gogosina were studied to understand where to find sources of fish and how to navigate back to land, once it was learned that these birds rarely flew more than thirty miles out to sea. The gogosina became pointers in Samoan culture, not only in seafaring navigational knowledge, but as an example in how to best nurture the young. In exchange for this commitment, the proverb also alludes to an expectation of discipline and patience on the part of the young for a worthy reward.

The Samoan proverb, "O tama a tagata e fafaga i upu ma tala, a'o tama a manu e fafaga i fuga o la'au" advises that children are fed on words and stories while birds are fed on flowers and trees. There is an implicit connection here between this proverb on raising young, and the gogosina who inspired the contemporary term "fāgogo". In the gogosina's dedication to the



wellbeing of their young, rising early and often travelling for extended periods and distance to procure food, it suggests that raising children on words and stories is essential. It suggests that words and stories not only nurture and ensure the wellbeing of the young, but that, in the act of providing such nourishment, the storytellers act as agents like the gogosina providing pointers to “the way home”.

By Tui Atua’s etymology, the contemporary utility of fāgogo is to serve as pointers “to the way home”, to Samoan *tu ma aga* (behaviour) and *metotia* (skills); to cultural values specific to a village (*āganu’u*) and ostensibly, in some cases, a country (*āgaifanua*). This suggests that nurturing Samoan youth with fāgogo in a diasporic context could provide a cultural connection to their indigenous homeland through the exposition of values and principles, expanding their perspectives with a *fa’aSamoa* (Samoan way) approach to rationalising the nature and reason of the world.

Academics in Samoan Culture and Language, Seiuli Vaifou Aloali’i Temese (Temese) and fellow educator<sup>12</sup>, Taupā’u Luatutu Fiso Evelini Fa’amoe (Fa’amoe), reinforce that fāgogo was the pedagogical mode of instruction and conditioning historically employed by Samoan elders to transfer knowledge between generations (Temese & Fa’amoe, personal communication, April 13, 2016). Shared with children from their earliest age, such knowledge included (but was not limited to) the customs and culture of a land, roles and responsibilities of family members, games, the Samoan language, and values such as *vā feiloa’i* (social mores in conduct and behaviour between people), and *vā tapuia* (an understanding of the character inhabiting sacred space in different kinds of relationships) between an individual, their family unit, the community, and the environment (Ibid).

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<sup>12</sup> Fa’amoe was retired from the National University of Samoa at the time of her participation in this research.

*The utility of fāgogo in cultural identity formation*

In the social studies program developed at Samoa's Secondary Teachers' College by former administrator and educator, Gatoloai Tili Afamasaga (Afamasaga), a significant emphasis was placed on the link between cultural identity and language. Afamasaga's resource materials were structured to encourage Samoan teachers to employ information from their own home environments, and to use their own fāgogo to teach the Samoan language.

Prioritising this auto-narrative, and recognising the connection between the home-grown language and cultural identity, was a central concern to the construction of Afamasaga's social studies curriculum through the 1980s to 1990s. Afamasaga was mindful that a person's understanding of their own self is inextricably linked to their academic and professional prospects. To address this, students were paced through courses on themes of "being and becoming" to ask questions such as, "Who am I? Who do I want to be?"

Afamasaga comes from a school of thought informed by Albert Wendt and Aiono Fana'afi Le Tagaloa (Le Tagaloa) that seeks a reference point, some material evidence or artefact within the Samoan culture, that can demonstrate itself as the catalyst for each fāgogo. Afamasaga notes that Le Tagaloa drew her points of reference for Samoan legends from what she termed the "lagi solo", literally translated as "singing poetry" or "sung poetry":

... For her, [lagi solo is] a word she used for any physical evidence, if you like, of whatever the story was about.... The physical evidence could be a story, it could be a physical thing like a rock or whatever people have in a particular area that's part of the legend (Afamasaga, personal communication, April 12, 2016).

A loose relationship exists between terminology "fāgogo" and "tala o le vavau". Anecdotal evidence has shown the synonymous use of "fāgogo" with "folk tales", while classifying

“tala o le vavau” as myths and legends, but these are non-Samoan distinctions that attempt to separate and compartmentalise components of Samoan oral storytelling legacy and history that often borrow from or directly inter-weave with each other (Kruse Va’ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016). ‘Fāgogo’ are stories that prioritise the nourishment of creativity and imagination over their degree of truth, while ‘tala o le vavau’ literally translates to ‘forever stories’ or ‘stories of origin’. Closely related to ‘tala o le vavau’ are ‘tala fa’asolopito’: stories about heritage or history that are passed down through generations in stories that ‘live forever’, nuancing the Samoan way of thinking about history (Suaalii-Sauni, personal communication, February 7, 2017).

In Afamasaga’s distinction, legends are classified as the feats of human heroes while myths were the creation stories that might exist on their own or within other stories. Myths explicitly tried to explain the nature and, in particular, physical manifestations of the world; they were a study of how Samoan people endeavoured to humanise every idea and observation. Using the above distinctions, “tala o le vavau” and “tala fa’asolopito” would encapsulate both myths and legends, while fāgogo might weave them by method into something separated from the original facts in order to nourish the imagination and impart a lesson.

These perspectives raise such questions as, at what point does a folk tale become a legend, then a myth? By whose scale and definition? And what is the significance of such a scale and distinction?

Anthropologist and film-maker, Lealaitagomoa Dionne Fonoti (Fonoti) asserts that Samoa’s fāgogo legacy produces stories that organically transcend a singular delivery. The same

stories, themes and characters re-appear, are cycled and recycled, recursively through generations of faifāgogo (storytellers). By their improvisational nature, fāgogo are designed to continue living, extending and transforming through time, between faifāgogo and villages, perhaps even across modes of delivery. Fāgogo naturally makes performers of its audience, within Jenkins' terms of performance being when the audience performs an action as part of or in response to the story (2009b). Further, this established mode of recycling, extending and transforming fāgogo enacts the complementary qualities of continuity and multiplicity, by building story worlds that families and villages immerse themselves within over generations.

When fāgogo do not conclude with a happy ending, characters can improve their circumstances and relationships (vā) over the next re-telling or expansion (Fonoti, personal communication, April 5, 2016). This is possible through oral tradition due to the recursive nature of Samoa's narrative ecosystem allowing faifāgogo to "presume the audience knows something of the story we tell them" (Ibid). Fonoti suggests this can produce narratives that are neither expressed chronologically, nor in alignment with Joseph Campbell's progression of "the Hero's Journey"<sup>13</sup>, or even contained within a typical Aristotelian three-act structure.

Repetition is a key characteristic to the effectiveness of fāgogo's practice with young children. A fāgogo would often be repeated more than once within the same week. Producing the same pattern would allow the listeners to study a fāgogo's riddles, to internalise and later recognise patterns of events, characters and themes, and to draw on those lessons beyond a fāgogo setting:

They will say, "He shouldn't cry. He should just run away." And then I say, "But, you know, he's so small like this, and the giant is so big like this. How can this small boy

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<sup>13</sup> In his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell (1949) argued that all stories, regardless of their context, are fundamentally the same in the narrative's progression. He calls this "Monomyth" the "Hero's Journey".

have bigger steps to get to where he wanted if he is being chased by this huge man?” And they will say, “He should pick up a stone and throw it!” It’s so funny, it also brings out the ideas of the kids....

And when I said to them, “You know Samoauliuli turned and said? Ave mai ‘oe, le pala ‘ai.” So that means Samoauliuli finally came to his senses at the end, when he was with his father, he knows he was secure. I even related that to us running away from the devil and into the hands of our father, Father God... I implied the biblical application to my story (Fa’amoe, personal communication, April 13, 2016).

Fāgogo provided a site of reflection and a mode of comparison where scenarios could be posed, and listeners compared narrative outcomes with their existing knowledge on that subject matter. The introduction to fāgogo, especially at a young age, inducts a person to different ways of thinking, of the nature and ways of being and becoming. This is achieved by exposure to diverse cultures and ways of doing things (Kruse Va’ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Exercised at the earliest age of a child, fāgogo could inspire a hunger for stories, an interest in literacy, and an inquisitive attitude that would lead children to seek out their own stories, accumulating new ideas and knowledge (Fa’amoe & Temese, personal communication, April 13, 2016).

In this way, fāgogo entertains, fosters practical skills, and provides a commentary that responds to a portrait of society at a particular time and place. Fāgogo serves as a means to process and speculate, infer or deduce by observation and learned experience from the surrounding environment. The stories and specific elements change with the travelling context of their audience and/or storyteller; fāgogo is subjective. It is an oral mode of time-keeping, reflecting and memorialising.

Kruse Va’ai posed the suggestion that if fāgogo is a method rather than, or as well as, a collection of stories, it expands our understanding and the potential utility of the fāgogo practice. Faifāgogo can tailor their content to deliver a story in a fāgogo style that still

expects to instruct something; a story that bears the expectation of a response from the audience, is lively, engaging, and delivered orally, not in printed form. Fāgogo is participatory in its delivery. Kruse Va'ai stated that, in doing so, the Samoan fāgogo will continue to distinguish itself from other Samoan narrative forms and Pacific Island cultures of storytelling.

Extending reflection on the utility of fāgogo to inspire conversation and reflection, Fonoti (personal communication, April 5, 2016) also describes a distinctive responsibility and opportunity for Samoa's storytelling legacy. In a postcolonial age, indigenous storytelling by and for minority groups has the charge to protect the people represented, preserving their humanity, and crediting them with all the faculties and abilities merited to other ethnicities, particularly their colonisers.

This prerogative is rooted in a culturally-specific endeavour to tell stories that satisfy the goals and assumed roles of a Samoan faifāgogo. Fonoti (personal communication, April 5, 2016) asserts this is an indigenous prerogative that positions itself in distinction from Western-European narrative methodologies where the cultural expectations may differ in both production method and subject matter. Specifically, the historical context of Samoan culture as a collectivist society still asks its storytellers to bear the burden of representation, the implications of their work for 'the collective', diverse and distributed though the Samoan people are throughout the world. This may influence not only the nature of stories they tell, but the ways those stories are told.

### Nature and style of delivery

Samoan storytelling is conversant, talking back to its environments, and should not underrate the utility of allusion and subjectivity, transferring interpretation and understanding from the faifāgogo (storyteller) to their audience (Kruse Va'ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Recognising that every village has its own fāgogo provides insight into the village's lived realities, identity and culture. Many fāgogo point to specific and actual locations within the village's physical existence (Tui Atua, personal communication, April 11, 2016).

As also stated by Meleisea et al. (1987, p. 10), an appreciation of context illuminates why different versions of the same story may also exist. This drives an impetus to identify those villages of origin and understand their versions, the environment in which those fāgogo developed, and why. When updating a historically-established fāgogo, returning to a fāgogo's origin, understanding the personal history of those characters at the centre of those stories, and the political values of the time would mitigate the risk of misappropriation (Tui Atua, personal communication, April 11, 2016). These stories and their meaning, particularly their spiritual meaning, are interwoven with their poetry and chants.

It's like the story of Lata. You have to go there, have a look at the landscape, look at the sky, imagine yourself as Lata about to migrate out there. Go out there, see it at different times of the year. See it as the humbled currents come, come in at that time, you can virtually double your speed or even more because you're taken by the current. Have a look at that, at particular times of year. How do I relate to the stars, the moon and the sun? How do they speak to you; because that's all that they did: the conversation with their environment (Tui Atua, personal communication, April 11, 2016).

In addition to village and regionally-specific idiom, the geographic origin of a fāgogo can also be distinguished by the utilisation of accents and tones in conventions of speech and storytelling:

We have accents, it's now disappeared, but where my grandfather came from was Asau, and they would speak Samoan like 'kato' [imitates deep voice]. So, when I was in Parliament and I was angry or I was trying to make a point, I reverted to that speaking.

I was asking someone, "Why do you say this word with a 'k'?" And he said, you listen when I say, "Ai tae", then [sharply] "Ai kae". I remember my teachers talking about Tonga, and he said, "You know, you only use the 'h' of 'he-ka-ro' in two instances. One is 'hu'" and the other is 'halu'. And what it is, is because it's in Tongan.

The Tongans have also their stories about Samoans "hamoa o le ma'a", to wipe yourself with stones. We're forever teasing each other, but when it comes to scholarship, we're quite serious about comparing our language with other people's languages (Tui Atua, personal communication, April 11, 2016).

With chanting fāgogo (tagi fāgogo), the shift of expression, pace, or intonation can transform the entire meaning. This convention of tonal shift has survived in modern Samoa with the example of religious (such as Catholic) ritual and liturgy (Tui Atua, personal communication, April 11, 2016). The short chants, songs or rhyme from a particular character served as the climax of a fāgogo, imparting advice, dramatic resonance or reflection in line with the fāgogo's themes (Fa'amoe & Temese, personal communication, April 13, 2016). Depending on the fāgogo in question, whether well-established stories handed down between generations or created anew, the chants or songs may be familiar cultural canon or new to the listeners (Fa'amoe & Temese, personal communication, April 13, 2016).

Fāgogo does not prescribe to a strict tone in genre. Many of the interviewed academics cited experiences with fāgogo that were scary, funny, or otherwise. Faifāgogo would adjust their style, tone of voice, and use of language in accordance with each audience, time, and place.

### *The invitation to fāgogo*

Although fāgogo is historically held either in private homes or the local village malae (shared field), an accomplished faifāgogo could operate in any environment, even classrooms or



shared public spaces such as a marketplace (Kruse Va'ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Within the home environment, a faifāgogo was normally an elderly family member, a grandparent or parent. Often taking a position to rest or sleep, Fa'amoe & Temese (personal communication, April 13, 2016) describe that the audience would be invited to simply listen, "Logo fa'atutuila", an idiom meaning to be silent and listen like the people of Tutuila, or to listen responsively by saying, "'Aue" at prompted intervals. The "'aue" response served as confirmation for the faifāgogo that listeners were still awake and engaged.

#### *Navigating the space between audience and storyteller*

An inherent distance exists between audience and faifāgogo that both are trying to bridge by mode of the story. A good faifāgogo relies on their previous skills and experience as a storyteller; a good audience relies on their previously learned stories and lived experience. Between them lies the space of new potential – new stories or familiar stories told in a novel way: "A good reader can really bring a story alive, but a good writer makes that story alive with or without a good reader" (Kruse Va'ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016).

Fāgogo were highly responsive in nature. When performing, it was important for the faifāgogo to understand the audience. Live performance would allow the performer or faifāgogo to respond in real time to what successfully engaged their audience. Audience and faifāgogo create and consume interchangeably, collectively providing space for creative exploration and innovation in pursuit of what Fonoti described as the "power and mana" (personal communication, April 5, 2016) that only a good faifāgogo can bring forth. The talent of the faifāgogo is measured by the strengths they enlist of their chosen delivery mode, to capture the imagination of the reader, to inspire a response that is not only mental but within their heart in pursuit of a shared mana – the power and awe of immersion.

Taking fāgogo into a co-creative mode of storytelling between audiences and faifāgogo(s) shifts considerations into the realm of theatrical faleaitu where “people are responding from the stage and the barrier between audience and performers is not so clear” (Kruse Va’ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Temese & Fa’amoe (personal communication, April 13, 2016) make a distinction between aitu of the self and aitu as they are commonly expressed in mainstream and popular culture -- malevolent or trickster spirits:

**EVELINI:** Everyone has aitu.

**SEIULI:** We all have aitu. That is why when you feel excited, that’s your aitu. When you’re happy and, “Ah!” That’s your aitu.

**EVELINI:** That’s why when we have fiafia, we call it faleaitu. When people are happy and they do funny things, we call it faleaitu.

**AMY:** Because you’re being possessed by the aitu and it could be happy, it could be scary or...

**SEIULI:** Not really a ghost, it’s part of you, it’s part of a human being. Because everybody feels excited and does a lot of funny things, so when your feelings are being stirred and you are so excited about something, and you do funny things in front of people, that’s your aitu. And when the aitu goes away, you calm down again (Fa’amoe & Temese, personal communication, April 13, 2016).

Faleaitu (literally translated as “house of the spirits”) is historically a site of social and political satire. In faleaitu sketches, normative status roles are reversed: the high are made low and the world momentarily “turned upside down,” as found in carnival traditions elsewhere in the world (Sinavaiana, 1992). The intention of faleaitu satire is to turn convention on its head and reverse the balance of power to mock pretension or hypocrisy. The faleaitu style of comedy and ‘clowning’ satire permeates Samoan culture. Kruse Va’ai (personal communication, April 7, 2016) suggests faleaitu’s communal intelligence of its contemporary audience and cooperative mode of performance can be traced back to Sunday School in Samoan communities. Entire communities were socialised in these styles of performance from the earliest age through the requirement for children to perform annually

on White Sundays of the church calendar, also known as Children's Sunday Services or Le Aso Sa o Tamaiti.

### **The journey towards the digital fāgogo: Contemporary use and investigations**

Changing contexts of time and place now provide the faifāgogo with opportunities to extend fāgogo practice through the indigenisation of different methodologies, theories, cultures, language and narrative canons, privileging non-mainstream audiences of Samoans. The transition and transformation of fāgogo through these new contexts are explored in this section.

#### **Taking fāgogo into contemporary environments within Samoa**

Afamasaga (personal communication, April 12, 2016) recalls that her own teachers from pre-secondary schools in the 1950s shared many fāgogo stories, including myths and legends, though it is unclear if these were part of the formal curriculum. In Afamasaga's experience of secondary school, fāgogo was absent. Instead, students were set a foreign curriculum with unfamiliar subjects such as English history, rather than the history of the islands in which they lived.

When foreign-educated Samoans returned to Samoa in the 1970s, they were able to inform the re-development of secondary school curriculums. The scope and mission of this work was informed by predecessors such as Aiono Fana'afi Le Tagaloa, the first local director of the Department of Education. Le Tagaloa had returned to Samoa in the early 1960s and initiated an interest in instruction of the Samoan language and culture. This included the art of Samoan storytelling, and would eventually integrate Samoan myths and legends into the social studies curriculum.

Le Tagaloa identified a need for the curriculum to be Samoan-ised and contain content familiar to its Samoan students. Her team of educators, Afamasaga included, were instructed to collect stories from their families and any available contributors, then design activities around those stories to be part of the curriculum. Afamasaga continued this approach when she assumed responsibility for developing a program to train teachers in cultural and pacific studies at Samoa's Secondary Teachers' College. The first of these courses was on myths and legends "of Samoa and the Pacific" (Afamasaga, personal communication, April 12, 2016).

Teachers in training at the college were instructed on how to interview, collect and transcribe data before approaching their fellow villagers and elders. These students collected fāgogo, oral traditions and knowledge of the material culture, such as shark fishing, all narrated in Samoan by the elders of the time. Upon completion of their training, it was then at the students' discretion how they used this knowledge to inform the development of their own curricula.

From 1972-1987, Afamasaga delivered a four course program for Samoan secondary school teachers in training. After an initial paper on Samoan myths and legends (and an invitation for students to consider the biblical book of Genesis as a collection of early stories), students studied the physical geography of their environments, song and dance, and finally, creative writing. This sequence was mindfully chosen to allow students to experience a particular style of learning before they could create, to understand the theory before applying it in practice.

Afamasaga has credited the success of her program to its synthesis of different disciplines in a mode of holistic learning tying each component back to its role and utility in everyday life of the students. The program empowered Samoan students to recognise the value of their language, oral legacy, traditions, and every day "material" culture:

I would invite a canoe carver, for instance. And he would come and carve under the big tamaligi tree in Mālifa. They would set up a little tent under there, carve a whole canoe, and the students would go along and listen to the language that he was speaking, "I'm doing now, this is the pattern I'm using, this is the part of the canoe...." Samoan language. And so they were learning, but knowing some of these students had never seen a canoe being carved by somebody. So, I started that kind of program at Teacher's College so they would see learning in that holistic manner. And they would also see that what was familiar in their everyday life was important for their learning, that it wasn't just learning about people in the other parts of the world (Afamasaga, personal communication, April 12, 2016).

Although the emphasis of fāgogo's historical application is in the socialisation and education of young children, both Fa'amoe and Temese noted fāgogo have been employed at the university level of education in the manner of "case studies" to express Samoan philosophy and culture. Kruse Va'ai, Fa'amoe and Temese state that such philosophy and culture commonly survive in the contemporary language through the form of words, phrases, proverb, and idiom. Fāgogo provide contextual insight into their origin and how such artefacts of philosophy and culture were intended to be correctly applied to everyday life.

The review of such cultural artefacts also provides a creative and entertaining vehicle for the survival of Samoan language in the face of what Fa'amoe argues is the loss of correct Samoan language by the passage of time and the "vice" of transliteration:

**SEIULI:** Not only fāgogo, but all these old Samoan songs. We were singing, they love to listen.

**EVELINI:** We explained to them the origin of the song, who composed, and why they composed it. And then we starting singing the song... but they didn't know.

**AMY:** Wrong lyrics?

**EVELINI:** That one, *Mauga Loa Muamua Fesili ia Fao*<sup>14</sup>. They said “Mauga Loa Ma Mua” and yet there’s no mauga<sup>15</sup> in Fagaloa called “Mauga Mua”. It should be “Mauga Loa Muamua Fesili ia Fao”. ‘Loa is long’ and because ‘fao’ is higher than ‘mauga loa’.

**SEIULI:** So, Mauga Loa should ask Fao first whether the sun is risen. Because you know when the sun rises, it shines on Fao first (Fa’amoe & Temese, personal communication, April 13, 2016).

### Decline of historical fāgogo and cultural erosion

Tautunu believes an interest in fāgogo persists to the present day among children, especially primary students. Unfortunately, Tautunu has observed the practice of sharing fāgogo declining, specifically from parents to their children. The specific mention of parents here may point to a change in family structure where the typical providers of fāgogo – parents, grandparents and elders – are either not present, or other interests and alternatives are overtaking the time and space historically inhabited by fāgogo.

This has raised concerns of a cultural and social erosion (Fa’amoe & Temese, personal communication, April 13, 2016; Tautunu, personal communication, April 7, 2016) and the suggestion that cultural values (e.g. *vā fealoa’i*, *vā tapuia*) commonly instructed from fāgogo now lack a widespread alternative means of contemporary distribution.

Fa’amoe (personal communication, April 13, 2016) acknowledged there is a challenge for “traditional” fāgogo to compete with the appeal of new media and non-Samoan forms of entertainment in a globalised environment of fast-paced change. In her view, the introduction of this new material has redirected time and an interest in both parents and children that would have previously been invested in nurturing an indigenous, native-grown understanding

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<sup>14</sup> Mountain ‘Loa’ first asks the mountain ‘Fao’.

<sup>15</sup> Mountain.

of Samoan identity, history and “the values of their existence”. Fāgogo historically supplemented qualitative time between families in teaching their children how to understand, speak and conduct themselves within their various contexts.

This suggests that Samoa is still negotiating its relationship with new forms of media entertainment and introduced technology. Fāgogo has neither been supplemented nor replaced within Samoa by lasting and sustainable alternative modes of media that explicitly speak to the original functions and social utility of the fāgogo practice.

#### *The space between homeland and diasporic Samoan audience*

New styles of storytelling recognise recent generations of Samoans and their new contexts. As Samoan communities, we speak primarily about how fāgogo was historically experienced by the majority (Kruse Va'ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Many of the recent generations have never experienced fāgogo, but seek its connection because someone dear to them may have experienced it growing up themselves (Ibid). Kruse Va'ai suggests that the contemporary connection to a fāgogo-like experience is now via a parent or guardian reading stories to young children.

All participants agreed that the historical fāgogo methods and content are still important in terms of expressing Samoan traditions, recognising and understanding culturally-specific caricatures that are informed by core characters of Samoan (fāgogo) folk lore.

Samoans are already producing their own films in Samoa and New Zealand, many of them very popular because, as Kruse Va'ai describes it, “they link to what matters to every day Samoan life” (Ibid). When we understand that the lived experience of everyday life will be different for each Samoan, especially across generations, Samoan audiences may want stories

that remark on both what is current and what has been. What “matters” is therefore a subjective experience providing a breadth of opportunities not only on subject matter, but who can become the storytellers of today.

One project exploring such opportunities by sharing both our history and contemporary stories of interest through a variety of media is *TheCoconet.TV*: an online platform for multimedia of interest to Aotearoa-based Pacific Islanders, that looks outwards to the wider Pacific Island region inclusive of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia. Lisa Taouma (Taouma) is an executive producer of the Auckland-based Tikilounge Productions company that launched *TheCoconet.TV* in 2013. Taouma observed that one surprising lesson for the *TheCoconet.TV* production team has been that they have not needed to rely on comedy to hook their intended audience (personal communication, June 19, 2016). With the understanding that their “Kiwi Pacific” audience boasted a high representation of baby boomers who were loyal followers of accomplished Polynesian comedic performers such as the Laughing Samoans, and Pani & Pani, time has proven *TheCoconet.TV*’s most successful pieces have, in fact, been what Lisa calls “the heritage pieces”.

One such example of these is the Tongan legend series recently commissioned by *TheCoconet.TV* through Malosi Pictures – *the Digital Fānanga* – that has garnered close to half a million views since the first video launched in October 2015 (TheCoconetTV, 2015). *TheCoconet.TV* counts its success by measure of individual views across the sum of their social media platforms. Google Analytics have provided granular insight into the distribution of *TheCoconet.TV*’s audience, their activity and preferences when visiting the platform.



## Building towards a digital fāgogo in Aotearoa

With the passage of time and continued dispersion of Samoan communities in new environments, faifāgogo actively reconcile the past and the present across time and space. It is necessary for them to understand their communities, their new environments, and the formational or historical fāgogo of their native homeland in order to parse those stories in a way that allows those fāgogo to travel to new contexts. Faifāgogo can help contemporary communities both within and outside of Samoa to negotiate, nurture and remain connected in this space between. This serves the benefits of 1) maintaining a connection to the indigenous homeland, 2) allowing the homeland to recognise the validity of contemporary versions on native soil, and 3) for that homeland to recognise and understand their diasporic communities.

## Cultural considerations

In Samoa, certain stories (tala tu'u) can be relayed as fāgogo through generations in relation to the gafa (genealogy) of a family. These tala tu'u are not merely a system of facts or information, but can be protected as a hereditary treasure due to the tangible social and economic implications of their disclosure. Tautunu noted that it is not unusual for access to such stories to be negotiated in the sense of bargaining, earning trust, perhaps through tautua (service) to be recognised by the custodians, but also in a collaborative approach to knowledge or a production of a story's version that may only hold true for that one telling.

Tautunu stated that it is a locally-held belief by the Aleipata district of Samoa's island of Upolu that only people from a village or district have a right to study the fāgogo of their village and district, as it is their measina; a sacred heritage they are claiming and of which they take custodianship. However, in Tautunu's own experience as a teacher, elders and

matai may intentionally provide misleading information to their own people, students performing field work in their homes. Tautunu suggests this misdirection was rooted in a belief that outside lecturers and teachers would benefit the most from this information. Although measina may be the heritage of youth, they are required to earn it in the eyes of their elders and matai to become its caretakers.

Tautunu sees a direct relationship between the reluctance to share fāgogo tala tu'u' and gafa, and the disputation of the rights to matai titles in the Land and Titles court. The ruling of Land and Titles cases in court is determined by the evidence, that is, the petitioner's knowledge of the tala tu'u or the tala fa'asolopito (history) and gafa demonstrating the origin of that matai title.

You have to start from the oral traditions and your right to this land, so your genealogies, how you're related to this land, why you belong to this land. But it depends on the evidence that supports your argument in the Land and Titles Court (Tautunu, personal communication, April 7, 2016).

Mitigating the fa'asamoa tapu (Samoan taboo) protecting this measina from exploitation or negative manipulation requires a patient and persistent approach: a researcher who ideally comes from the village / sub-district / district in question, and has the perseverance to re-visit custodians of the measina on multiple occasions to demonstrate their dedication to both the research and the village that the measina belongs to through the provision of mea'alofa.

Once you befriend with an old people, despite sometimes I knew they gave me lies or the wrong stories, I revisit and revisit, ask them, brought some beer for them – that's the other good method of research. Especially for these kind of topics. So, sometimes I brought them crates of beer and we talk. After three bottles, they talk and talk and talk: the history of the village, the genealogy of the village. I'd end up going another day and they'd give a different story (Ibid).

The nature of oral history and gafa in Samoa may be as fluid as its stories, designed for growth and modification over time and between tellers, and only as accurate or complete as the collective present are willing to recognise it as such; as Albert Wendt said, “We are what we remember.”

We, as scholars, can get the theories and ideas from the overseas and local scholars, but people living in village now, their knowledge is from their way of serving the matais. You know, Samoans believe, with their expression, the way to the authority is through service – o le ala i le pule o le tautua -- so our knowledge from the fa’asamoa is passed from our chiefs.... (Ibid).

Many of *TheCoconet.TV*’s stories are presented in the style of speaking directly to the camera, breaking down “the fourth wall”. Some stories feature an intermediary presenter, at other times, the one speaking to the camera is the owner of the story themselves.

I like stories where you have the person weaving the mat or scraping the taro, they’re just presenting it themselves. So, it’s kind of like that community talk about real people stories (Taouma, personal communication, June 19, 2016).

The success of indigenous heritage pieces and stories from the community on *TheCoconet.TV* suggests an audience responding to true accounts, and what Taouma describes as an “authenticity of voice”: where stories from a community can be shared with minimal compromise on what they tell and the way their stories are told. Taouma states that this preference for authenticity and “realness” has resonated across subject matter, the chosen figure delivering it, and production. Audiences have not withdrawn from media of interest even if it has employed simplified, improvised and adhoc film production principles at the expense of high production standards. How a story is told is not so critical, as *what* is being told and by whom. Taouma likens this to the appeal of instant communication and timing, “the right timing of the pieces going out” but, most importantly, authenticity of voice and a community reclaiming their agency.

Among a community whose stories have more often been appropriated or told by others, the integrity of narrative and the authenticity of the voices telling those narratives is highly scrutinised by its members in an ongoing litmus test of belonging and the subsequent ‘right’ to speak. The Pacific Island community of Aotearoa directs this lens of scrutiny not only on outsiders, but its own members.

In response to postcolonial power dynamics, particularly with the ascension of Pacific Island individuals in Aotearoa to ranks and industries not typically associated with their cultural heritage, the celebration of a narrative instantly communicated, unfiltered and untampered, complete with mistakes, allows the high to be made low in their fallibility; it equalises perception of individuals with accomplishments and hard-earned titles to common people with a shared humanity.

I want to create this storytelling that’s all about reaffirming identity. That’s what I love the most about what we’ve done on the Coconet and Fresh, it’s just been a mirror for people to go, “Oh there’s more people like me!” (Taouma, personal communication, June 19, 2016).

By virtue of membership through a common lived experience, communities develop awareness and intelligence for deviations from the true and familiar in both fiction and non-fiction, “It only works because people respond to their real characters and their real dialogue. Getting the dialogue right, it’s got to be the right voice” (Ibid).

The subversion of mainstream offerings through a Kiwi Pacific lens has been another reply to the problem of content diversity and narrative appropriation. Fresh TV’s *Game of Bros* inducts their audience through familiar show formats, but takes the show in uncharted directions through the irreverent displacement of the reality television genre into new

contexts.

#### The challenge of dwindling sources and version control

Afamasaga has noted that, in recent years, many elders in her own villages have grown reluctant to discuss the old Samoan stories and knowledge. Other elders present an interesting challenge by bearing new versions of a story every time they are approached: rather than the challenge of version control, could this purposeful deviation instead be presenting a potential to be realised? In an oral tradition where narrative deviation is the norm, where ownership and ‘correct versions’ are regularly contested, is there an opportunity to retain all possible versions while maintaining space for the collective to negotiate the new potential?

One of the greatest challenges for fāgogo that relate to tala o le vavau, Taouma recognises, are reconciling myths or legends with multiple known endings on a platform such as *TheCoconet.TV* which delivers only one version of a story at a time. If these stories could be delivered in a way providing for all of these endings, or a way for the audience to select or influence the outcome, this could provide a means for Samoan communities to review and negotiate discussions about “one correct version”.

#### The logistics of content delivery and funding

*TheCoconet.TV* was developed before what Taouma describes as the “social media boom”. The advent and widespread adoption of social media has significantly affected the delivery, consumption and ability for *TheCoconet.TV* to design and track how far their content has spread. All moving image (video) content is delivered through *TheCoconet.TV’s YouTube* channel, but with the introduction of *Facebook’s* feature to embed video and play direct,

*TheCoconet.TV* has experienced significant appropriation of their content by external *Facebook* pages often behaving as an individual hub of moving image content.

For a project that relies on metrics of views, likes and shares to secure funding, *TheCoconet.TV* production team has had to invest resources into tracking the re-distribution of their content. Although they have no means to compel the owners of these pages to remove the appropriated content, they are able to capture the number of views, likes and shares the content collects through these *Facebook* proxies.

Taouma has conceded that, in future, she would endeavour for the funding model to allow video uploads directly to *Facebook* despite misgivings about the reliability and accuracy of *Facebook*'s metrics. The ability to consume, like and share content with minimal effort on the viewer's part was not foreseen and accounted for in *TheCoconet.TV*'s original design. *TheCoconet.TV* platform has neither been able mitigate nor respond to changes in technology at the rate new functionality is being released.

## Chapter 5. CASE STUDIES OF DIGITAL MEDIA

The search for a digital fāgogo required the development of parameters for the selection of digital media produced, created or redistributed by Samoans in Aotearoa. Definitions were developed from the sum of previous literature on fāgogo (Dunlop, 1986; Tui Atua, 2003; Kolone-Collins, 2010; Meleisea et al., 1987; Moyle, 1981; Purcell Sjölund, 2013; Silipa, 2008) and Talanoa performed with participants:

*Historical / Formational fāgogo content:* Narratives of Samoan history, custom and belief established in the indigenous Samoan oral history prior to the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1830 (Dunlop, 1986, p. 43). These specifically relate to the Samoan people's history within the contemporary nations of Samoa and what is known as American Samoa. These fāgogo (e.g. the Turtle and the Shark, Sina and the Eel) provide the origin story for aspects of Samoan culture including physical land formations, village organisations, social practices and mores, philosophical beliefs, historical events, and people. These fāgogo are likely to include or be delivered entirely in lagi (songs), solo (poems) and/or tagi (chant).

*Contemporary fāgogo content:* Contemporary narratives that do not function as an explanatory point of origin for an aspect of Samoan culture, but as reflections, commentary or speculation on life. These fāgogo may or may not include reference to Samoa's indigenous oral history and fāgogo techniques of lagi, solo and tagi. Contemporary fāgogo are found both within and beyond Samoa.

*Historical / Formational fāgogo principles:* Fāgogo is delivered in-person, orally, with the purpose of imparting some information to nurture a person's sociocultural wellbeing, imagination, and – ideally – to foster the bond between faifāgogo and audience. The

faifāgogo and audience agree how the story will be delivered (with prompts to continue, or to continue without prompt until the end), the audience and the faifāgogo have the opportunity to react and adjust to each other and the story as it is being told, and an opportunity is provided at the end to collectively reflect on the understanding and meaning. Fāgogo is highly dynamic and experimental in its narrative material, tools and techniques. It may borrow from other stories or be a rendition of an existing story.

*Contemporary fāgogo principles:* Emerging uses of digital media that are not indigenous to Samoa, but reflect indigenisation and appropriation of such media and their frameworks in service of fāgogo's historical principles.

I found that there are very few digital artefacts that describe themselves as fāgogo. Resonant with the dearth of research on the intersection of fāgogo and digital media in Aotearoa, there simply are not many works to be found online that both were clearly created by or for Samoans in Aotearoa, and explicitly reference the narratives of fāgogo oral practice in their context. Of those that did explicitly reference indigenous content from Samoa's oral traditions, these were either:

1. Fāgogo produced by Samoans within their indigenous context as part of a research project and digitised for later preservation:

- 1.1. *Fāgogo. Fables of Samoa* was produced for online audiences by the University of Auckland as part of the "Archive of Maori and Pacific Music". This project digitised a small sub-set of Richard Moyle's (1981) original research capturing fāgogo under the broader study of ethnomusicology. The sub-set online have been made available for the purpose of learning the Samoan language.



- 1.2. *Myths and Legends of Ancient Samoa* was produced by the Victoria University of Wellington as part of the New Zealand Electronic Texts Collection under the “Tidal Pools” project, digitising texts “from Oceania for Samoan and Pacific Studies”. This project solicited these texts for the purposes of providing a researched and written account of Samoa’s history up to 1918.
2. Fāgogo produced by or for Samoans specifically for audiences based in Aotearoa:
  - 2.1. *Rays of Sound Project: Gagana Samoa* by Victoria University of Wellington
  - 2.2. *The Legend of Sina and the Eel* by Victoria University of Wellington
  - 2.3. *The Legend of Sina and the Eel* by G56 Creative
  - 2.4. *The Legend of the Cannibal King* by Mario Faumui for theCoconet.TV
  - 2.5. *Sau Fuga Sina* by Mema Sesega and Tupe Crawley for theCoconet.TV
  - 2.6. *Surfing for Sina* by Tusiata Avia for theCoconet.TV
  - 2.7. *Malaga*<sup>16</sup> by Wadalife Films

The above do not comprise a complete list of all the available media that reference Samoa’s oral fāgogo practice. They have been chosen for the discussion of their diverse and distinctive features.

However, I considered the argument that Samoans have simply explored new content along with new forms (Dunlop, 1986; Mallon, 2002; Sharrard, 2003). To explore where this could be manifesting online, I returned to popular digital social spaces to reconsider their use

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<sup>16</sup> Although ‘Malaga’ was originally produced in Hawai’i, the nature of fāgogo and digital cultures brings it within the scope of this research, as will later be explained.

among Samoans in Aotearoa for conversation and social exchange such as *Facebook* and *YouTube*.

In *YouTube*, I found evidence of Samoans appropriating foreign folk tales (*Island Time*), and adapting them in a fāgogo style in service of the historically formational objectives. These digital media were performed for live audiences in theatre and later uploaded through the performer's official channel to *YouTube*. These artefacts served to carve a place for Samoan communities in these appropriated narratives, nurturing cultural identity by rendering these stories in a culturally-specific and sensitive way to Samoan audiences. By virtue of their placement on socially networked platforms like *YouTube*, they continue to live on as artefacts catalysing negotiation of Samoan culture and identity.

On *Facebook*, I found Samoans collaborating in pan-Polynesian productions that launched their stories off the back of social experiments leveraging the viral effect and distributed networks of social media (*Baby Mama's Club*). I found Samoans telling their own self-authored soap operas that towed the line with the faleaitu practice (*Faitoto'a o le Alofa*). I found Samoans sharing common lived experiences and nurturing their sense of community through memes commiserating “#SamoanProblems” or celebrating “Samoan Quotes and Sayings”.

And I found stand-alone experiences like *the Factory Story* that deliberately attempted to relay their story over a variety of media traversing different platforms. I studied the pan-Pacific, multimedia project of *TheCoconet.TV* that similarly branched into a variety of digital social spaces from its stand-alone hub to serve its mission as “a virtual island homeland to explore and interact with the global Pacific village” (<http://theCoconet.tv>).

Although these latter digital media did not explicitly reference stories of indigenous Samoan oral traditions, their contemporary narratives illustrate contemporary approaches that ultimately facilitate the formational principles of fāgogo in this new environment. This will be explored on a case-by-case basis through the digital media below.

A comparative matrix analysis of digital artefacts is provided at **Appendix B**.

Moving forward, it is important to remember the terms of fagogo that will be used within the scope of this research:

a **fāgogo** is the historically oral means and method of nurturing Samoan cultural identity through storytelling. These stories were historically interlaced with song, chant, poetry, and delivered at night by elders or parents for young children. The scope of these stories was intertextual by nature and could include creative work (tala fatu), stories handed down between generations (tala tu'u), Bible stories (tala Tusi Paia), and myths and legends;

a **digital fāgogo** is a fāgogo designed natively within and for the digital, networked environment to fulfil historically formational fāgogo principles.

### Digitising the historically formational fāgogo

When Samoans speak of fāgogo, it will more often than not rouse memories of settling at the feet of a family member or teacher to hear a story. With respect for the historically formational principles of fāgogo's practice, the first step of collecting relevant digital media

sought examples that overtly attempted to emulate these principles or referenced formational fāgogo narratives. The focus on formational fāgogo at the initial stage of research was due to its higher recognisability in the Samoan community as “fāgogo”. The two digital artefacts within this section were produced in the indigenous context of Samoa, at the behest of non-Samoan researchers for the purpose of recording Samoan oral history and culture. These were later digitised and reproduced online in a very different form of delivery that could not entirely emulate the historical fāgogo principles.

What these artefacts demonstrate is that a digital fāgogo should not be conflated with *digitised* fāgogo. A digital fāgogo is media designed and produced natively for an online digital framework to fulfil historically formational fāgogo principles, while a digitised fāgogo has been transposed from a discrete context with its own considerations.

#### Fāgogo. Fables of Samoa

In 2015, the University of Auckland launched “Fāgogo. Fables of Samoa” within their online Archive of Maori and Pacific Music. This archive was begun in 1970 to promote research into the music of indigenous communities of New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. “Fāgogo. Fables of Samoa” (<http://www.fāgogo.auckland.ac.nz>) is an abridged collection of historical fāgogo narratives from a larger body of work collected by Richard Moyle during his research into “traditional” forms of Samoan music during the 1960s. Moyle describes his field of ethnomusicology as a study of how the performing arts, including fāgogo, provide insight into culture:

Ethnomusicology is able to look at how people perform their music and relate that to values in society, the way they organise in society, how they prioritise things over other things, how they express values towards each other towards the institutions that

make up that society. And they can express those in performing, in the performing arts (The University of Auckland, n.d.).

In this collection, audio files of fāgogo recorded from cultural custodians are provided alongside English and Samoan transcripts for the purpose of language acquisition. No feedback mechanism or mode of discussion with the archivists is provided. The selected fāgogo are provided in a graduated scale of difficulty. Either or both transcripts can be hidden at the desire of the user:

Their present value on this site is more for their linguistic content than their musical features, because they are intended to allow the student of Samoan language to learn as a Samoan child primarily does – by listening (The University of Auckland, 2015).

Transcribed and translated by Moyle, these transcripts were checked by Galumalemana Alfred Hunkin who has supported other projects by the Victoria University of Wellington to archive historical fāgogo narratives such as “The Legend of Sina and the Eel”, also for language acquisition. It should be noted that some Samoan scholars have cautioned that grammatical and spelling errors exist in the Samoan texts of Moyle’s translations. It is not clear if these errors persist in the online archive of “Fāgogo. Fables of Samoa”.

This digital media functions primarily as a tool for learning the Samoan language by listening and reading along. However, it also demonstrates the disconnect that occurs when a cultural artefact playing a very specific role in society is taken out of context. To its credit, the fāgogo in this collection indicate their places of origin. Acknowledgment of the faifāgogo and the village where these were relayed is a significant feature, not only out of customary respect for the cultural custodian, but in recognition of context and its potential bearing on reception and interpretation.

As a fāgogo, these artefacts' potential for sociocultural nurturance is impoverished because, while it imparts language, the learner is left to independently glean what the narrative tells them about Samoan culture. As a cultural artefact in isolation, the learner is not provided an appropriate reference framework to comprehend this fāgogo's role in the cultural fabric of its village. This will be especially difficult for learners from non-Samoan frameworks of knowledge.

Because this resource is designed for online use by individuals at their discretion, un-guided and without a means to discuss, rather than learning by social guidance and discussion, "Fāgogo. Fables of Samoa" also lacks a significant characteristic of formational fāgogo principles: the ability to negotiate meaning and understanding between the faifāgogo and the audience.

This digital artefact does not provide the ability to converse or interact with the faifāgogo, the "collector" of the fāgogo, nor the digital archivist from the Victoria University of Wellington in real time. While the administrative team behind the project might be contacted by email, this is a delayed interaction mode in stark contrast to direct interpersonal exchange allowing the audience can tease out any riddle or moral at the core of the fāgogo, clarify details, or understand how such a fāgogo informs the learner's understanding of Samoan culture, behaviour, or protocols. For example, which themes in the narrative are intended to be prescriptive, and others cautionary? What are the allegories? If certain symbols are employed that bear specific meaning, how will the audience's attention be drawn to these, and what guidance is provided for their interpretation?

If fāgogo such as these are to perform as fāgogo in the holistic and historical sense, it is necessary for the audience to have a means to interact directly with the faifāgogo.

Unfortunately, without further contextual details in or around each fāgogo in this digital collection, it is furthermore impossible for the learner to recognise or understand the nuance of any terms of phrase; the relevance of rhythm or vocal tone to the fāgogo's objective; whether the fāgogo belongs to that faifāgogo's family, their village or another village entirely; other variations of that fāgogo and the value to be gleaned in those differences.

These digital media are an improvement on the original published text by Moyle, as the written fāgogo can be read alongside the oral recording. However, Moyle acknowledges that an overall understanding and appreciation of the art form also requires understanding of what was visibly underway in the original delivery which is lacking here (1981, p. 13).

Furthermore, this artefact lacks any mention of cultural protocols that may or may not be relevant to its treatment and re-distribution in a networked, online environment. Extracted from such considerations without instruction, viewers can only treat such case studies in this collection with the (potentially insufficient) non-indigenous protocols of its new context, such as protections of copyright. This is even more difficult than in offline environments of intellectual property: digital environments enable content to spread with even greater ease and immediacy.

By measure of the formational principles, a contextual guide or form of instructions would be necessary for this type of artefact to perform in its entirety as a fāgogo. However, the current format of delivery may be a reflection of resource availability. The original faifāgogo of these

stories is unlikely to have been available or predisposed for such an ongoing arrangement facilitated by technology.

Within the scope of these case studies, the content and approach of Richard Moyle's digitised fāgogo lacks key formational principles: i) a means to quickly and directly negotiate the audience's understanding, and ii) guidance for both an overarching appreciation of fāgogo's place in the cultural fabric of Samoan society, and the associated responsibilities of the audience upon reception of the fāgogo.

#### Myths and Legends of Ancient Samoa | NZETC

In a distinct departure from the historical orality of fāgogo, the Victoria University of Wellington has provided a written account of Samoa's history up to 1918 under the New Zealand Electronic Text Collection. Authored by native matai<sup>17</sup> Te'o Tuvale at the turn of the twentieth century, this written account of Samoa's oral history was made available online under the Victoria University of Wellington's project entitled "Tidal Pools: Digitized Texts from Oceania for Samoan and Pacific Studies".

The New Zealand Electronic Text Collection comprises significant New Zealand and Pacific Island texts and materials held by Victoria University of Wellington Library. This encompasses both digitised heritage material and born-digital resources (Victoria University of Wellington Library, 2016).

It is assumed that Tuvale's written history will have sourced Samoa's indigenous oral traditions, including fāgogo. While some might think that fāgogo usually refers only to the myths and legends of a culture, the roots shared between myth, legend, and factual historical record are less clear in indigenous histories. Although other sections of Tuvale's history of

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<sup>17</sup> Titled person or chief



Samoa are also written in the manner of a narrative, his distinction of “Myths and Legends” demonstrates an isolation of fāgogo with a clear supernatural element, where forces of nature work in ways that would bely common observations or belief. It is necessary to recognise that equating “fāgogo” only with “myths and legends” is a misnomer and Western distinction (Kruse Va’ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016) that ignores the breadth of fāgogo’s historical role in Samoan culture, and scope that can su’i fefiloi tala tu’u and tala fa’asolopito, performing as a cultural link across generations of Samoan society with each other and their environment.

This nature of fāgogo is asserted by Kolone-Collins (2010, p. 23) and Le Tagaloa (as cited in Kolone-Collins, 2010), in that upu (words) and tala (stories) are meaningless without the fāgogo that connect the body, mind and soul to the land and sea, and other matters that support life in Samoa. Moyle’s (1981) audio archive demonstrates that these upu and tala can all materialise in different ways and with distinct meanings, subjective to their faifāgogo’s performance and context. The social utility of fāgogo is therefore to act as a tool of connection, an instrument that provides cohesion and, through reflection, an understanding and synthesis between individuals, their environment, and their larger context within the present, past and future.

As a resource in service of sociocultural nurturance, this written account of Samoa’s history up until 1918 struggles to perform as a tool of holistic sociocultural connection as the fāgogo themselves are served without a framework placing them in context. Tuvale’s records do not always identify the person or village sourced for the fāgogo, and this is a concern for the reasons cited earlier with the fāgogo digitised by the University of Auckland. Tuvale’s

records neither provide a means by which to negotiate understanding or gain meaning for the audience's everyday life.

Similar to the digitised fāgogo of Moyle's research (1981), this collection of historical texts from the Victoria University of Wellington is a valuable project for its accessibility in the online environment. These projects provide evidence to a global Samoan community, separated from their cultural heritage, of their indigenous language and history. Both projects fulfil a distinct and specific purpose, but despite their use of fāgogo, they themselves do not perform as digital fāgogo in the holistic sense. These projects are valuable illustrations of negotiating the priority and primacy of culture when an artefact with a specific mode and function in one context is transported into a foreign environment and still attempts to be meaningful. To both projects' credit, they acknowledge their limitations and reduced capacity to fulfil their original function. It is the challenge of a digital fāgogo to assess the cultural imperatives of historical or formational fāgogo and seek ways that digital storytelling principles can fulfil them.

### Contemporising the historically formational fāgogo

The following set of digital media illustrate fāgogo that take formational or historical content and produce new narratives for Samoan audiences in Aotearoa. Unlike the previous resources under consideration that were produced offline and later digitised, these artefacts have been designed for contemporary media, and blend formational with contemporary content.

#### Rays of Sound Project: Gagana Samoa

Contrasting with the text-only offering of their *New Zealand Electronic Text Collection*, the Victoria University of Wellington have also launched the *Rays of Sound* project. Contained

under the auspices of their Language Learning Centre, the initiative provides Samoan digital audio artefacts in the interest of facilitating linguistic education and preserving cultural heritage. The project describes itself as a “digital audio-book shelf” (“Rays of Sound Home,” n.d.), digitising cassette tapes that were created between 1980 to 1990 that, in turn, held songs and material knowledge recorded over the course of the twentieth century:

The whole idea of favouring audio is that language is mostly spoken and we’d like to support that or spread the spoken word, the oral language, if possible.... At the language learning centre, we’re trying to expose people to as much audio, as much spoken language as we can because that’s where real language takes place. The written word is important but there’s sometimes all too much emphasis on written and printed and not enough on spoken, and we just wanted to promote the sounds of the language, and a space online that accommodates the sounds of that language and keeps it alive (“Old Samoan songs and stories made available online,” 2015).

Focusing on one example provided through this ‘digital audio bookshelf’, *Sina Ma Le Tuna* – meaning “Sina and the Eel” – the artefact provides an audio stream of a story that is styled as a radio play alongside a link to the record of the accompanying book resource in the Language Learning Centre.

A traditional Samoan story, retold as a play. Sina makes a pet of an eel, but she doesn’t know that he is really the King of Fiji in disguises [sic], and he has a special gift for Sina and her people. Suitable for self-study (Alama, Hunter, & New Zealand. Learning Media, 1995).

Delivered entirely in Samoan, this fāgogo is once again designed for independent study. Unlike the fāgogo from Moyle’s collection digitised from custodians in Samoan villages, *Sina ma le Tuna* was collected from a radio play written by Ester Temukisa Laban Alama, a Samoan-born teacher credited with writing “innovative adaptations of Samoan legends and stories for children living in New Zealand” (“Ester Temukisa Laban-Alama - oi,” n.d.).

Delivery of fāgogo in the home might have historically been performed by a single person who would adopt the complete cast of personas, regulating their voice and performance to inflect each character in turn (Kruse Va'ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016; Temese & Fa'amoe, personal communication, April 13, 2016). However, fāgogo delivered on the malae could also be performed by traveling troupes of a cast of characters (Fonoti, personal communication, April 5, 2016); therefore, this digitised radio play with separate voice actors has precedent in historical practice and formational principles.

For lack of visual aids, the radio play enlists sound effects to provide the native context: the crash of waves on the shore, the call of the conch shell – environmentally-specific cues seeking to transport the listener to an island setting. The radio play also supplies a musical score with non-indigenous instruments that have since been adopted into the contemporary Samoan musical repertoire: a guitar, ukulele and the airy notes of an electronic synth keyboard. Between the score and sound effects, the backing soundtrack supports the vocal performance, transcending language barriers to allude to the tone and character of the plot.

The second half of the fāgogo brings in the characteristic lagi (song) that would typically provide a choral reflection, highlighting the story's themes and events. "Sina, o'oe la'u penina" ("Sina, you are my pearl"); the love song from the King of Fiji (Fiti) to Sina.

After this song, another song follows. This new lagi is not an extension of the first fāgogo, but a distinct rendition of the same fāgogo performed entirely in song by a different faifāgogo with backing vocals, and with a different series of events. There is an absence of audio post-

production in this second lagi as the singers drum on the fala (mat), suggesting these two fāgogo were spliced together for the convenience of access on the digital audio bookshelf<sup>18</sup>.

Within the single digital resource, we are left with a multiplicity of narratives: two versions of the tale, which is not made clear from the user's interface. In this digital artefact, formational content is remixed into a contemporary radio play media form, and digitised from a lagi solo delivery. They provide two contrasting approaches to accessing the fāgogo's "world" through an audio recording: the radio play using creative cues in post-production that focus on illustration of the physical environment of the Samoan island setting, while the lagi solo employs historically familiar chorus, chants and instruments to focus audience attention on the indigenous oral techniques and content.

While the historical approach illustrates where the faifāgogo intends for the audience to invest their focus, the radio play also recognises the importance of painting the fāgogo's intangible context. The radio play exploits its ability to transport the audience into new contexts. It seeks to embed the narrative with contextual markers that can help the story to be traced to its origin. For this reason, it performs better in an online environment. Although the fāgogo delivered by lagi solo also bears a sum of indigenous Samoan orality, it is not designed to be portable and self-explain its contextual markers in foreign environments.

Despite the strengths and weaknesses of both versions of this fāgogo, the fact that they are contained within a single digital item of media risks them becoming synonymous, or left in unresolved tension within a project that was not designed to support multiple continuities of a narrative.

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<sup>18</sup> These may have been presented together at the time of producing the original cassette tape.

Furthermore, this artefact's ability to function as a fāgogo in the sociocultural aspect suffers similar problems to the media raised earlier. This digital audio bookshelf provides formational fāgogo content and knowledge of material culture, but no means by which to support collective learning. There are no mechanisms in the *Rays of Sound* for conversation, negotiation or discussion with either fellow members of the audience or the faifāgogo. There are no contextual frameworks that instruct the audience on the faifāgogo's intended lessons: what values, principles or themes the fāgogo seeks to communicate.

However, another example of Alama's online learning resources could provide a template for such a means. *O le Pepe* (Temukisa Laban-Alama, n.d.) translated in this instance as "the Butterfly", is a digital song provided alongside bilingual transcriptions of the lyrics, and a framework that explicitly identifies:

- the target learning demographic
- values highlighted by the song (excellence; innovation, inquiry and curiosity; diversity; equity; community and participation; care for the environment; integrity);
- the key competencies fostered (managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing; thinking; using language, symbols and texts);
- achievement objectives (all in relation to technical competency in performing the arts associated with sound);
- learning outcomes (the ability to identify the musical features distinct to Samoa; the ability to sing rhythmically, with expression and in tune; the opportunity to celebrate Pacific culture; the ability to create appropriate movements to express ideas in dance).

This gentle song provides an opportunity for children to practise pronouncing Sāmoan words and would link to a class topic about life in Sāmoa. It's important for the children to sing the words with understanding, appropriate expression and correct pronunciation. With practice and careful listening they will be able to pronounce the words and become confident with the rhythm. (If there are Sāmoan-speaking children in the class, they will be able to lead the way) (Temukisa Laban-Alama, n.d.).

Elements of Alama's example may prove to be the level of detail required in a digital environment for digital media to meet a fāgogo's historical principles as an online resource of Samoan sociocultural nurturance and personal development. Fāgogo of this nature can utilise formational or contemporary narrative content, or both, provided they are supported by a means or a framework that states their context and sociocultural objectives.

#### The Legend of Sina and the Eel (by Victoria University of Wellington)

In another branch of the Victoria University of Wellington's Language Learning Center, they have begun to provide Samoan legends of 'ancient Samoa', demonstrating a focus on fāgogo of historical narratives:

Sāmoan legends contain rich and meaningful stories of ancient Sāmoa. These stories tell of what happened and how the people conducted their lives, but they also provide historical settings for the social, cultural and moral aspects of Sāmoan society (Hunkin & Paillat, 2007b).

Currently, the collection only holds one fāgogo: Sina and the Eel. In a journalistic style, the narrator explains that this fāgogo serves to explain the origin of the coconut. Describing the lagi solo for the story of Sina and the Eel, the artefact provides stock footage of the real locations and environment spoken of in historical versions of the fāgogo, from the village district of Safune to the infamous pool where Sina and the Eel swam together, "Mata o le Alelo".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Eyes of the 'Bastard'; a euphemism for a Samoan curse.

However, in direct contrast to the formational fāgogo approach, this media becomes less of a living fāgogo and more a meta-factual account reporting the presence and purpose of the fāgogo in its journalistic and objective style. This is likely a design decision reflecting the resource's educational function in the context a non-Samoan learning culture that seeks to distil knowledge to unchanging, objective fact.

The resource allows the user to practise their knowledge of the Samoan language by listening, reading, and watching stock footage to visualise the context of the fāgogo's origin. Alongside the video, the Samoan transcription of the narration also provides an English translation per term on mouse-over. However, an issue arises when a word has multiple translations dependent on context, and it may be unclear which one is applicable in specific instances. This is an ideal situation where a means to clarify the correct term usage would be appropriate. This digital media provides the option to email the creators at the bottom of the page, but it is unlikely that email correspondence would be a sustainable practice in the long-term with changes of staff and resource availability.

Despite this lack of direct contact with other members of an audience or a faifāgogo in real time, this media provides other supporting tools to nurture comprehension of the fāgogo: 1) a questionnaire of the events in true or false style, 2) in multiple choice style, 3) and a Samoan transcription where the user must fill in the missing terms. By this approach, the resource affirms the extractable lessons, and tests the audience's memory and understanding of the fāgogo in the context of Samoan and wider Polynesian culture. These are key principles of the formational fāgogo method that are lacking from other digital media within this research,



demonstrating a keen awareness of the challenges and opportunities of operating in a digital environment.

#### TheCoconet.TV

Where the previous case studies are micro-examples of fāgogo on a story-by-story basis, the Pacific Island web portal of *TheCoconet.TV* (<http://theCoconet.tv>), is considered here as a “macro” example of fāgogo storytelling seated within a collective Pacific Island narrative: a su’ifefiloi of history, contemporary and indigenous oral traditions, and testimonies from Pacific Islanders of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia.

Funded by NZ On Air’s Digital Media Fund, *TheCoconet.TV* is a response to the comparative lack of media available in Aotearoa for Pacific Island audiences. NZ On Air’s Digital Media Fund (2016) focuses on projects that target “special interest” audiences in Aotearoa such as children, youth, ethnic and other minorities in the community, arts and Maori. NZ On Air’s Digital Media Fund is an initiative of its Digital Strategy to reach audiences wherever they are. The Digital Strategy (NZ On Air, 2012) has three core goals supporting this mission: to provide multiple channels for funded content, fund digital media for targeted audiences, and enhance options for content discovery.

To support these goals, *TheCoconet.TV* is designed to interweave a narrative experience through the composition of different media on a variety of platforms in “a virtual island homeland to explore and interact with the global Pacific village”. It invites the participation and contribution of the audience for the final formation of a composite Pacific Island identity in Aotearoa and abroad. *TheCoconet.TV* achieves this engagement with audiences by its Facebook plug-in facilitating conversation on all feature pages, and the spread of its media

across dedicated digital social spaces for *TheCoconet.TV* on *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Tumblr* and *Twitter*.

In this manner, the multimedia web portal addresses a key function of formational fāgogo methodology: as a mode of reckoning with the world, proposing a larger narrative of who Pacific Islanders are as a community by their sum of stories, and individual engagement with *TheCoconet.TV* and each other. Produced and staffed by members of the Pacific Island community in Aotearoa, *TheCoconet.TV* allows narratives chosen by the community to also be told by and in concert with the community. *TheCoconet.TV* describes who this community are, what they look like, what they are doing and, implicitly, what they value, by virtue of what they and *TheCoconet.TV* producers choose to share and feature. Every time *TheCoconet.TV* adds another digital artefact to its archives, it nurtures recognition. It invites discussion. It is an assertion of belonging to a global Pacific Island narrative.

While every page invites audiences to join discussions or contribute original content, I found that *TheCoconet.TV*'s core engagement strategies centre around the promotion of conversation or the redistribution of media. *TheCoconet.TV* is a site where the negotiation of cultural identity is in every media item, exemplified by every endorsement when the audience click 'like', when they share or redistribute media, or engage in forums of discussion. Due to the diversity of fiction and non-fictional content from a variety of Pacific Island nations, both historical and contemporary, *TheCoconet.TV* provides a unique opportunity to contextualise media within a nation's culture, and within the broader scope of the Pacific Islands. Samoans and Pacific Islanders can negotiate the place and meaning of these media to their culture and identity on an individual level, and to the broader community.

The following digital media in the remainder of this section were either produced or circulated by *TheCoconet.TV*.

*The Legend of Sina and the Eel (by G56)*

This rendition of *Sina and the Eel* was circulated by *TheCoconet.TV* under their collection of findings by ‘Creative Natives’. Aesthetically, this rendition of the famous fāgogo by Auckland-based company G56 Creative (G56) produces a blended visual storytelling language, acknowledging its indigenous Samoan origins with textures of siapo within the media of digital animation.

On a fertile, black background, the animation’s first greeting are the aural notes of a flute instrument in the fāgogo’s musical score. If this audio cue was made with consideration for what instruments are popularly associated with historical narratives in the past (rather than an attempt to bring awareness to such instruments as the Polynesian nose flute), the conch may have proven a better choice for a Samoan narrative. This approach, paired with the soundtrack of waves, and the later rise of the choral cry resonates with Alama’s style of radio play on the *Rays of Sound* project to transport the audience to the islands. Narrated by an elderly man in Samoan-accented English, *the Legend of Sina and the Eel* upholds the historical practice of matua (elders) performing as the faifāgogo.

Socioculturally, the story of *Sina and the Eel* is a staple of the Samoan fāgogo practice and provides an indigenous account for the origin of the coconut. However, it also performs as a geographical marker, placing landmarks of Samoa on the map. Unlike other renditions of this fāgogo, when Sina befriends the eel in G56’s version, he insists he is of royal blood – a Prince – but this Prince does not disclose his kingdom. Some versions say that the Eel is from

the village of Fiti'uta on the island of Manu'a (Tavale, 2012, p. 403-4), others from the nation of Fiji (Alama, Hunter, & New Zealand Learning Media, 1995). Regardless of origin, this lack of geographical reference in G56's version is the first act distancing it from its historical recognition of movement between Samoa, modern American Samoa and Fiji.

By stripping the story of its geographical landmarks, merely mentioning "the island of Savai'i", it removes this fāgogo even further from reality and degrees of believability. Sina's village of origin is not mentioned, nor does this version require Sina to cross large bodies of water in a small va'a (boat), fleeing to another island entirely – from Savai'i to Upolu – to escape the eel when he grows "larger and more demanding of Sina's love".

This rendition suggests an attempt to distil the essence of the fāgogo to a form that transcends location, local custom and social organisation, such as the recruitment of the aumaga (fellowship of men without matai titles) in the village of Moata'a for Sina's protection. However, in doing so, the fāgogo loses crucial and culturally-specific markers that ground it as an artefact of Samoan storytelling. The pool where Sina and the Eel swam together is a landmark in the village of modern day Matāvai on Savai'i, named "Mata o le Alelo", as demonstrated in the version provided by the Victoria University of Wellington's Language Learning Center. All the places named in other versions of this fāgogo are real villages that survive today. As stated by Afamasaga (personal communication, April 12, 2016), these are "lagi solo" – the physical evidence and reference points demonstrating the connection between the fāgogo, the land, and the people.

Although this fāgogo satisfies the measures for formational content, its circulation on *TheCoconet.TV* enables a space for negotiation and discussion, its distilment by G56 is a

cautionary tale for the journey of indigenous stories to digital media frameworks with global audiences and expectations, no longer serving the indigenous community alone. Furthermore, despite its redistribution within the sophisticated framework of *TheCoconet.TV*, this digital media suffers the same challenge as previous examples: not directing its audience to further material to place this fāgogo in the broader sociocultural context.

### *Legend of the Cannibal King*

Written by Mario Faumui and produced by *TheCoconet.TV*, *the End of Cannibalism* or *the Legend of the Cannibal King* (TheCoconetTV, 2014) demonstrates a venture to bring the twenty-first century generation of Pacific Islanders in Aotearoa into contact with their cultural heritage in contemporary ways:

‘Know your roots’ takes a funky fresh twist on a classic legend to bring you a different way of telling Pacific stories.

This legend is about how cannibalism ended in the islands of Samoa. Long ago when King Mālietoa ruled the Islands of Samoa, families had to sacrifice their loved ones for the King’s feast. But one warrior took a stand against the king and stood up for his people (TheCoconetTV, 2014).

By the fāgogo method, *The Cannibal King* by Faumui and *TheCoconet.TV* su’i fefiloi’s (interweaves) historical narrative with contemporary language and storytelling techniques to impart history and social values. Addressing one of the key challenges of the fāgogo, this case study straddles the fourth wall to engage the audience in a conversant reflection on themselves in an attempt to close the space between audience and storytellers, “We know we Islanders love our food, I mean look at you. Yes, look at you!” (Ibid).

Engaging the audience in this conversational style, *The Cannibal King* establishes the audience’s relation to the narrative by recognition of their present context in Aotearoa. Live

action footage of contemporary food is presented in contemporary ways within a contemporary environment. For affordability (Taouma, personal communication, June 19, 2016), the moving image style then moves to animation, indicating the transition to “story time” and the past, before the final return to live action footage and present day at the end.

The contemporary content is interwoven with animated visuals of “Kanibals Kafe”, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the pervasive presence of cafés in contemporary Western culinary culture. While this depiction could be taken as a suggestion that a similar, widely-accepted attitude once pervaded regarding the practice of cannibalism Samoa, conversations with writer, Mario Faumui, reveal that this was not the intention (personal communication, September 19, 2016).

Contemporary urban expression (“You need to get some harden up cream boi!”) and bilingual fusions (“Fea your home a?”) ground the figures of myth and history within cultural reach of audiences distanced by time and migration. Comedy and fun are applied in a vibrant, vivid palette of fast-paced colour where the tale is explained as one might explain it to a contemporary Samoan youth in Aotearoa with no previous awareness of their cultural heritage.

The inclusion of contemporary content does not change the key elements or conclusion of the *Legend of the Cannibal King*. Cannibalism came to an end in Samoa. Lessons can still be drawn of cannibalism as an article of Samoan history, and the suggestion that practices unfit for a High Chief’s son are also unsuitable for anyone else.

The contemporary content in this fāgogo carry it into the non-indigenous environment of digital cultures without changing the core of its content or outcomes. *The Cannibal King* embraces the narrative potential of new delivery technologies and their established practices, allowing content creators to share history with contemporary audiences through recognisable terms, methods and technologies. This demonstrates an awareness of the fāgogo's original context, its new context and audience, and the audience's distance and potential ignorance of their indigenous history.

The delivery of this media through the social space of *YouTube*, and the inclusion of *Facebook*'s ability to comment on the fāgogo's page within *TheCoconet.TV* webpage, both enable a space for conversation to reflect and negotiate on the fāgogo's features and form. However, it does not explicitly prompt the audience to share their understanding. Neither does this fāgogo explicitly take measures to ensure, if there is a lesson to be learned, that the fāgogo's didactic intention was successful.

### *Sau Fuga Sina*

Produced as a lagi (song) and distributed through *TheCoconet.TV*'s Poly Song Book collection, "Learn the lyrics; read the history; share the island love" ("Poly Songbook — Coconet," n.d.), this fāgogo performs as a living record of a fundamental feature in Samoan culture – the feagaiga (covenant):

Sou [sic] Fuga Sina also known as Soufuna [sic] Sina is a song based on a legend told many times through Fāgogo, which acts as a reminder of the relationship that a Samoan brother has with his sister (Feagaiaga - Covenant).

The song explains the desire of the young Sina to obtain the Gogosina bird as her husband. Her 10 older brothers all named Tui go out in search of the Gogosina to fulfill [sic] the wish of their feagaiga and as they leave they tell her not to call for them no matter how long they're gone for.

She waits as long as she can and then calls for them but this gives away her whereabouts and the "sauai" [giant] Tui o le Tafue now knows where she is, comes to the fale and holds her captive.

When the ten brothers return they see Tui o le Tafue sleeping in the fale and are afraid because he is a supernatural being. The brothers all decide to run away except the youngest who decides to honor his brotherly duty to his feagaiga.

He goes in to the fale and ties Tui o le Tafue's hair to the posts of the fale. They all escape and when Tui o le Tafue wakes up he notices Sina is not with him anymore and pulls the whole fale down and in doing so kills himself.

The old Samoan saying goes

"O le i'oimata o le tama Samoa lana [sic] tuafafine" - Every Samoan boy should treat and protect his sister like the iris of his eye" ("SOU [sic] FUGA SINA — Coconet," n.d.).

The faifāgogo are no longer the matua, but the faces and voices of youth claiming these stories for a contemporary generation. Such songs in isolation function as contemporary bridges through the digital space back to the original fāgogo and their core lessons.

Transcending sovereign borders, the surviving lyrics strike at the heart of the proverb, promoting the persistence of such cultural values as the feagaiga in contemporary times. The provision of case studies in media designed to be shared, on socially-networked platforms such as *YouTube*, further this end.

This modern rendition retains the core of the original melody and lyrics. Supplying subtitles of the Samoan lyrics in addition to the contextual statement on the webpage assists the fāgogo to survive as a learning resource in both language and sociocultural nurturance:

Both fāgogo and the solo are designed to gently remind us not only of our core Samoan values and beliefs, but also of our village and/or family histories. They are meant to *sufi le tuā'oi* <sup>20</sup>between ourselves and God, ourselves and others, ourselves and all other living things. The phrase "sufiga o finagalo" refers to engaging in a prayerful way of negotiating boundaries (sufiga) between the various thoughts or

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<sup>20</sup> Negotiate the boundary



opinions (finagalo) of people. Implicit within this is the centrality of our belief in the spiritual world and the importance of this world to resolving disputes and/or maintaining the harmony (Tui Atua, 2016, p. 9).

### *Surfing for Sina*

Produced as an online feature from *TheCoconet.TV*'s writer of the month, Tusiata Avia's (2013) *Surfing for Sina* departs from the historical narrative of *Sina and the Eel*. It is so significantly altered that its connection to core Samoan beliefs and values, or even its function as an origin story for the coconut, are no longer in play. Avia's blend of historical characters in a contemporary narrative creates an entirely new experimental comedy with Samoan indigenous traditions about miscommunication and unrequited affection in an age of cyber-dating.

Smacking of a distinctly ruthless style of Polynesian humour, the tone of Avia's rendition subverts any nobility the eel may have claimed by transforming him into a pitiable trope of sweaty-palmed, socially inept tech support. In Avia's rendition, the Eel is not royalty, he is not even human before he dies of his "Hiroshima of heartbreak" upon Sina's rejection (Avia, 2013).

In some versions of this formational fāgogo, the eel is killed by the aumaga (the order of untitled men of a village) who come to Sina's protection at her behest. In these versions, before the eel dies, he asks Sina to take his head and bury it, to nurture and drink from the fruit it would bear, thereby enabling her to kiss him even in death.

While a historical touch point for the coconut's origin, this fāgogo simultaneously provided a cautionary tale about the repercussions of disrespecting the vā fealoa'i.

Although *Surfing for Sina* is inspired by this historical fāgogo, it stands on its own as a new experiment in indigenous storytelling -- departed from its origin, reclaimed and rendered for contemporary and diasporic audiences. Like Faumui's *Legend of the Cannibal King*, *Surfing for Sina* was made available on *TheCoconet.TV*'s online portal. This provided a forum for conversation with its audience, however, with its significant divergence from the historical narrative and messages, the historical sociocultural nurturance is not so clearly in play here. Similarly, audiences less familiar with historical versions of this fāgogo or Samoan culture may have failed to realise the degree of narrative adaptation if a link had not been provided below the video to the animated version produced by G56 Creative.

As we considered original fāgogo in the indigenous context of their environment, so too must we consider these case studies in the non-indigenous context of the online environment.

### *Malaga*

Similar to the historical Samoan oral culture, every time someone shares a story in social media, they become its new faifāgogo among their online networked community. Their introductory remarks (if any) appending the story steer the audience's attention, though it is not always towards discussion of a story's meaning or values. By this means, even fāgogo that were produced outside of Aotearoa can become appropriated into the local digital storytelling culture. This is how the short film of *Malaga* enters the scope of this research.

Based in Hawai'i, Wadalife Films first produced *Malaga* (meaning 'journey') for the Hawai'i International Film Festival in 2010. It was later added to *TheCoconet.TV*'s collection of 'Creative Natives' which behaves as a portfolio of Pacific Islander's (Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia) achievements in the creative arts.

Unlike previous examples, the live action feature of *Malaga* makes explicit reference to the fāgogo methodology. Opening in a mythical style, *Malaga* depicts a pair of brothers in a warrior's rite of initiation, before the film's revelation that this is a legend being relayed by a grandfather to his grandsons on "Honour. Respect. Victory. Pillars of the greatest warrior societies, maintained and nurtured through tradition. Initiation. Combat. War" (Wadalife Films, 2016).

*Malaga* behaves as a fāgogo within a fāgogo: the contemporary story of a grandfather trying to instil the value of *vā fealoa'i* in his grandsons to improve the temper of their bickering relationship. In a twist, it is revealed that he is one of the mythical figures in his own story, though he never discloses this to his grandsons. As the grandfather starts and stops the story to chastise his grandsons' wandering attention, or mourn their inability to comprehend him in the native Samoan tongue, the parallel between the grandsons before him and the brothers in the fāgogo grows clearer. Transitioning from subtitled Samoan to spoken English, the grandfather concludes his fāgogo by asking his grandsons if they gleaned the moral of the story.

Whether future fāgogo can or should prompt an audience's understanding of the meaning explicitly or by a meta feature external to the story itself, is a question of narrative style, audience demographic and context. What is clear from examples such as *Malaga* is that there are still fāgogo in the digital environment attempting to deliver the fāgogo the way it was historically practised; the contemporary audience, resistance and competition it must contend with; and the values and customs it still has to share.

## Adapting foreign fāgogo

The following digital media move from historical fāgogo narratives to study the appropriation and resampling of foreign folk tales through a fāgogo lens and principles. Originally performed in live theatre, these media were then digitised and redistributed through *YouTube*'s networks. In their original form, the folk tales would have possessed their own sociocultural objectives and methods, but the case studies here show that even popular mainstream allegories are not immune from subversion to highlight traditions and values of other (ethnic) cultures.

### Island Time

The four media items under consideration for this section are taken from the Laughing Samoan's *Island Time* skits that present a meandering rendition of *Jack and the Beanstalk* that crosses into *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (The Laughing Samoans, 2011), *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (The Laughing Samoans, 2013), *The Three Little Pigs* (The Laughing Samoans, 2014), and *Little Red Riding Hood* (The Laughing Samoans, 2012).

*Island Time* is a comedy skit delivered on stage in the style of a fictitious television show for children. It renders European folk tales through a Samoan (and occasionally a broader Polynesian) lens. Delivered to audiences in Australia and New Zealand, *Island Time* is part of the annual live comedy show by stand-up duo, "The Laughing Samoans", Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea'i. In *Island Time*, the Samoan comedians adopt the characters of Bryan and Jonathan, non-Polynesian storytellers of relentless positivity and occasional naivety. Smiling to excess, these *Island Time* caricatures highlight the ignorance of these non-Samoan personalities through their failure to appreciate cultural misalignment when non-Samoan

stories, principles, ideas, or simple language are brought into the Samoan context and become absurd: “Heigh ho! Hi, ho” (The Laughing Samoans, 2011).

This juxtaposition of Samoan and non-Samoan worlds in satirical mimicry of the “papalagi” is a popular trope of faleaitu practice, “The faleaitu reveals the farce, the fraud, the con-artist, the clown.... In comical presentations, the faleaitu also highlights the issue of identity” (Kruse Va’ai, 2011, p. 94). Throughout their *Island Time* skits, the Laughing Samoans deliver performances at the intersection of the indigenous fāgogo (in function) and faleaitu (in method of performance) that satirise broadcast modes of entertainment and education.

Faleaitu has no set boundaries between players and audience, between stage acting and real life. It meanders freely, its ultimate purpose is to entertain using truths which can be recognised and understood by the society from which it originates and to which it communicates (Kruse Va’ai, 2011, p. 92).

Narrative responsibilities are shared as Ete performs the objective role of narrator and Tofiga inhabits the entire cast list. The toll of this directly impacts on the style and events of the narrative, “And before too long that big, bad wolf came along... and I think he was already huffing and puffing” (The Laughing Samoans, 2014).

When the Laughing Samoans render *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, the Samoanised character of Goldilocks lacks the convenience of a smaller stature to invade someone’s home. This does not preclude her from eating their food or sleeping in their beds with no thought of replacing what she has taken. However, she quickly reveals the fault in her original counterpart's logic by playing on the stereotype of Pacific Islanders' preoccupation with food. Rather than a problem, this stereotype becomes a potential that is realised when Goldilocks demonstrates a straightforward intelligence, combining all three servings of porridge to equalise their temperatures. The sweet-natured, ignorant trespasser is a ridiculous spectre, but

in her childish innocence and irreverent cheek, she is endeared by her subversion of the narrative.

In their *Island Time* rendition of the *Three Little Pigs*, it is the stern and disappointed mother sow who catalyses the three little pigs to pursue individual home ownership, “I want you to remember these three words: whatever you do in your life, you do it to the best of your ability” (The Laughing Samoans, 2014). Houses are built to individual anthems and style, then demolished by a wolf with big lungs but low stamina.

The tale becomes less about the integrity of building standards, than the importance of another kind of foundation: inherited customs of respect, where the invader whose hubris towards tangata whenua secures their own undoing:

Who do you think you are... come into my house uninvited like this, bro? Didn't even take off your shoes, bro. I'm the only one who does the huffing and puffing in this whare, bro (The Laughing Samoans, 2014).

The recurring motif of the wolf is acknowledged with an intertextual nod from *The Three Little Pigs* to *Little Red Riding Hood* in the next year's performance as the Laughing Samoans are momentarily confused between the folk tales, “Too much huffing and puffing” (The Laughing Samoans, 2015).

Extending the themes from the previous year's performance in a Maori context to a Samoan family, the wolf is once again defeated not by a woodsman who has to trespass to save the grandmother and Little Red Riding “Lavalava”,<sup>21</sup> but by the home owner – grandmother herself. Elders and Samoan women possess a sacred position in the cultural hierarchy. Even

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<sup>21</sup> A generic term for a common type of Samoan clothing wrap that is worn in place of pants.

though the Grandmother is unimpressed by Little Red Riding Lavalava's lack of customary respect or deference to her grandmother in her childish naiveté, the Grandmother does not hesitate to apply her strength and autonomy to protect her family and repel the attacker: "But the grandmother, being Samoan, ate the wolf instead" (The Laughing Samoans, 2015).

Although the Laughing Samoans' style of performance is closer to the Samoan legacy of faleaitu, nested within their shows, *Island Time* inhabits a grey area of both satire and cultural nurturance in an indigenous reclamation of creative social space. Artefacts such as *Island Time* are not mutually exclusive about the legacy of their indigenous oral traditions. They perform an intersection fāgogo and faleaitu practice in first a non-Samoan stage of theatre, and then online social networks with narratives that defy the expectations of cultural erosion in contemporary, diasporic settings.

For Samoan audiences, case studies such as these are a subtle way of empowering their communities by placing them in the feature of popular folk tales, and gently nodding to historical values (vā tapuia and vā fealoa'i), even if only through allusion and allegory, as they are rarely named or ask for acknowledgement from the audience.

### Digital contemporary fāgogo

Having moved from the digitisation of historical fāgogo narratives to the ways that Samoans are appropriating and re-purposing the stories of others online, this section studies how Samoans are claiming digital social spaces with emerging uses of digital media that are not indigenous to Samoa, but reflect indigenisation and appropriation of such media and their frameworks in service of fāgogo's formational principles.

### Faitoto'a o le Alofa

In extension of the digital media like *Island Time* that perform at the convergence of faleaitu and fāgogo, this next artefact considers Samoans who are using *Facebook* as a storytelling platform rather than just a platform of conversation or re-distributing media from other sources.

*Faitoto'a o le Alofa* (Fui Fobservations, 2016, August 19) is an original production by Patrick Fuimaono-Rimoni that was made available through his *Facebook* entertainer-listed page “Fui Fobservations” (n.d.). Fuimaono-Rimoni is based in Melbourne, Australia. Through *Facebook*'s social networks that support spreadability of media (that is, minimal effort required to distribute the media), this media swiftly went viral. Similar to the *Malaga* artefact, *Faitoto'a o le Alofa* is brought into the scope of this research due to its adoption by Samoans in Aotearoa, who interacted and discussed it as members of the audience, before performing as secondary faifāgogo in the act of re-distribution among their own social networks.

*Faitoto'a o le Alofa* depicts an exaggerated Samoan experience in the diaspora: the challenge of preparing a ‘traditional’ Samoan dinner, complications with visas, and regular invocation of the extended family while neighbours are dragged into noisy marital disputes.

Fuimaono-Rimoni refers to his stories as ‘faleaitu’ (Fui Fobservations, 2016, August 19) and *Faitoto'a o le Alofa* is his personal proposal for the genre of a Samoan soap opera. This auto-classification aligns with Kruse Va'ai's description of historical faleaitu practice where narratives addressed contemporary issues and reflected current practices (2011, p. 98).



Faleaitu was and remains distinctive by the elasticity of its form and boundaries. This has enabled its survival into modern day and its transition into non-indigenous spaces and media (p. 92).

In *Faitoto'a o le Alofa*, audience members use *Facebook*'s social platform to discuss and celebrate the story with each other and with Fuimaono-Rimoni, the faifāgogo. Cultural stereotypes and experiences are tacitly discussed, rejected or affirmed through this narrative, and the fāgogo then becomes a living testimony drawing lines of solidarity or separation in cultural identity. The value in such contemporary fāgogo as *Faitoto'a o le Alofa* (and later *the Factory Story*, and *FRESH Housewives of South Auckland*) is their ability to convey relatable diasporic experiences expressed through easily adopted media and socially-networked platforms. It is the diasporic, twenty-first century counterpart to what Kruse Va'ai expressed regarding popular culture and social change in Samoa:

This is the very reason why such modern texts are also regarded as part of the post-colonial production of culture because culture is ordinary and is not restricted to the old and traditional or any other elite or exclusive categories. Samoans appropriate popular European forms and create their own distinctive ones, united in time and place in Samoa and using available modern medium such as the radio or television. Such 'cultural productions' are recognisably Samoan and they are part of that re-asserting process that allows culture and identity in all its multifariousness, to be expressed (Kruse Va'ai, 2011, p. 126)

For those who will recognise or identify with the caricatures depicted in these contemporary case studies, these stories serve as social hubs of commiseration and comic relief; a nurturance in the form of recognition that even though the minutiae of their experiences are not valorised by the indigenous Samoan canon, they are neither isolated nor invalid. In this way, such digital media are pursuing the formational fāgogo objectives for a mature Samoan audience, broadening visibility and understanding through empathy of the global Samoan community.

### The Factory Story

*The Factory Story* was a musical online series inspired by the original stage production ‘The Factory’ by Auckland-based Pacific theatre troupe the Kila Kokonut Krew. Funded by Telecom and NZ on Air’s Digital Media Fund in its inaugural year, *The Factory Story* was a direct response to the call for proposals targeting a Pacific audience (NZ On Air, 2013).

Marketed as a “Pacific musical drama webseries with a transmedia twist” (Ibid), *The Factory Story*’s activities moved across real world recruitment in community centres to radio, a social media engagement strategy straddling *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter*, behind-the-scenes and in-character blog posts from the characters reflecting on the events of each episode, and the webseries itself. The webseries ran for twenty episodes with each spanning from seven to twelve minutes in length.

A tribute to our Pacific people who arrived searching for the milk and honey dream. Their sweat and tears fell on the factory floor. Their voices will never be forgotten (Kila Kokonut Krew, 2013).

Although the content of *The Factory Story* was not from the pre-colonial oral history of Samoan fāgogo, both the original stage production and webseries performed as a didactic reconciliation of the principles, values and cultural mores of the indigenous Samoan past with the diasporic present of Aotearoa. It is a critical function of fāgogo to tell stories that communicate the elements believed to sustain the Samoan character through change, such as the foundation of the family and vā fealoa’i, protocols and customs to nurture the vā tapuia and alofa fetufaa’i. This sociocultural nurturance was performed by this narrative in the original theatre production and as a live action feature through *The Factory Story* musical webseries. Although live theatre has a precedent in the fāgogo practice, *The Factory Story* is

a staged production designed for online audiences rather than live audiences in person. *The Factory Story* is therefore a story that embraces formational and contemporary fāgogo principles, though not indigenous Samoan media.

*The Factory Story* is one of three case studies in this research that utilised digital tools and techniques to establish and maintain a relationship with their audience before, during, and after the run of the webseries. This was an informed choice due to its requirement to satisfy the goals under NZ On Air's (2012) Digital Strategy. Similar to *TheCoconet.TV*, it was necessary for *The Factory Story* to attempt a production that could reach Pacific Island audiences of Aotearoa in the social spaces where they were spending their time online. This production also had to provide multiple channels for their content to be consumed to enhance their discoverability by the audience.

However, in implementation, *The Factory Story's* activities across these multiple channels failed to design experiences that maximise the strengths, established culture and culturally-specific use of each platform by the online Samoan community of Aotearoa. Social media platforms were used primarily for the announcement of news and the promotion of content cross-posted from other platforms. Narrative content on the *Facebook* page was primarily designed for the blog as was made evident in the length, style, tone and formatting of both the written and still image content for each post. These digital media were composed in the style of a 'diary', rather than the 'open conversation' fostered by *Facebook*.

While a concerted discussion about the digital culture of Samoans in Aotearoa on social media is beyond the scope of this research, assuming a lack of differentiation is a dismissal of the opportunity to realise the full potential of Samoan storytelling online, that is, a digital

fāgogo. To dismiss this potential is to ignore the opportunity to negotiate the sociocultural value of media, ways of engaging, and the nature by which Samoans are fostering their communities online. Furthermore, the full potential of a digital fāgogo will not be realised until more producers and digital storytellers recognise the presence of this cultural nuance in the digital sphere.

### Baby Mama's Club

*Baby Mama's Club* is another example of a contemporary fāgogo that blends formational and contemporary fāgogo principles. Told in a webseries format delivered on *Facebook* and *YouTube*, *Baby Mama's Club* is a story that provides sociocultural nurturance through the recognition of the lives of young, pregnant, unmarried Pacific Island women in Aotearoa. When the webseries circulated through *TheCoconet.TV*'s archive of 'Creative Natives', it was implicitly woven into the ongoing, collective narrative of Pacific Islanders, and opened to discourse.

The story's concept came from the cast of actresses who also assume the dual role of writers for the show. In their Livestream discussion (*Baby Mama's Club*, 2016, October 12), the team cite their inspiration from the everyday conversations they would share about their mutual frustrations with the fathers of their children, the lack of work for actresses of colour in Aotearoa, and the lack of diversity on their televisions. Through a focus group sharing personal stories, the group developed the concept and the final cast of four main characters: four women who are involved with the same man (Ibid). This is an important aspect demonstrating that the stories about this group in the community are being selected and narrated by that community as well.

The show's pilot was preceded by a social experiment in *Facebook*: one of the title characters, Sophia Folau, sits shadowed in the intimate and vulnerable space of her bedroom submitting a weary plea for help from her social networks. In her filmed appeal, she discloses that she recently discovered she is pregnant by her boyfriend 'Johnny' who she met several months before. After sharing the news with Johnny, he has allegedly ceased all communication with her, and all her known modes of contacting him are failing. Sophia shared her intimately personal news in a public *Facebook* post to enlist the social network's powerful connectivity to help her find Johnny.

Within a week, the show's cast and writers revealed that the appeal was a fiction: one-part marketing campaign to promote the upcoming release of their webseries, *Baby Mama's Club*, and two-part social experiment to demonstrate to their funders and producers the problematic attitudes their show intends to respond to (BabyMamas Club, 2016, September 20).

One month later, the *Facebook* appeal had accrued 8.4k 'reactions', 12k comments, and 551k views. Included in the filmed appeal was the hashtag "#FindingJohnny", which quickly went viral and inspired a host of responses, from expressions of solidarity to slut shaming, and memes from people joking that they had found Johnny among their friends or family.

The proposal and execution of such an appeal through *Facebook* demonstrates an acute understanding of the show's subject matter and Pacific Island target audience, which is critical for an effective faifāgogo. However, what makes the team behind *Baby Mama's Club* effective *digital* faifāgogo is their ability to design media that tells a story while demonstrating a mature comprehension of how local cultures of Pacific Islanders behave on *Facebook*. *Baby Mama's Club* enlisted a highly intimate and personalised style of contact to

establish its connection; where *The Factory Story* treated *Facebook* like a news broadcast and diary of multiple personalities, *Baby Mama's Club* has employed it in an intimately familiar manner to the Pacific Island community in Aotearoa: as a platform for a person seeking direct assistance from, and connection with, their community.

The *Facebook* appeal was a highly effective marketing tool that spread quickly among the target community and enabled them to engage in a variety of ways. It spawned memes and discussions about the appropriate use of *Facebook*, and the conduct of young, unmarried Pacific Island women by opening discourse in Facebook through the post and reply mechanism, as well as a live Q&A session hosted by the show's cast and writers. In this respect, the marketing campaign performed as a highly effective prelude to a digital fāgogo narrative that hoped to renegotiate historical social mores and perceptions of identity, dignity, and self-worth. Unlike historical practices of fāgogo, the *Baby Mama's Club* story is not being told by elders to their youth, but by the youth who are living out the experience today. *Baby Mama's Club* is an example of how ethnic communities are appropriating digital spaces and storytelling technologies to exercise their agency of self-determination in a larger, ongoing narrative about culture and identity.

The marketing campaign enabled audiences to engage as co-creators / performers when they circulated the film appeal, the subsequent episodes, and contributed to the narrative with memes. This high level of participation was enabled by the choice to launch on *Facebook* with its large numbers of Pacific Island users. In contrast to other social media platforms, it may be argued that the Pacific Island community within Aotearoa has the longest running relationship and the greatest degree of experience with *Facebook*. As a result, this community

has enjoyed the time and the means to develop practices and confidence in how they use these tools, why, when, where, and for what.

The creative team have declared that it is their mission for *Baby Mama's Club* to promote awareness and sisterhood, to function as a narrative providing representation of the real attitudes and pressures of being a young, unmarried woman of colour who is pregnant in Aotearoa.

They may not enlist historically-established tagi, lagi or solo as their media, but the selection of a live action webseries provides an audio-visual medium that resonates with the performative orality of indigenous Samoan traditions. By airing the episodes and inviting audience feedback while the series is in production, the creative team are also exercising a historical faifāgogo capacity of allowing the audience to influence how the story is delivered. Their use of digital social spaces of *Facebook* and *YouTube*, and their circulation on *theCoconet.TV* reflect a progressive and contextually appropriate fāgogo approach to collectively discuss both the understanding and future direction of their project.

#### FRESH Housewives of South Auckland

In further examples of how Samoans are telling contemporary stories online in reflection and negotiation of their diasporic contexts, this research turns to the ongoing webseries *FRESH Housewives of South Auckland* (*FRESH Housewives*) produced under the auspices of *FRESH TV*, a variety television show targeted at Auckland Pacific Island audiences and also circulated by *theCoconet.TV*; both produced by the TikiLounge Productions.

Currently in its second season as of September 2016, *FRESH Housewives* is a South Auckland counterpart to reality television series such as *The Real Housewives of Auckland*, which in itself is a spin-off of *The Real Housewives of Melbourne* (Stuff, 2016). The *Real Housewives* franchise focuses on the personal and professional lives, challenges and intrigues of typically semi-affluent women.

A comedy in webisodic format with instalments lasting seven to twelve minutes, the *FRESH Housewives* narrative follows the lives of Samoan housewives and their families in South Auckland communities: Lei “the good wife”, Madonna “the almost wife”, and Faletua<sup>22</sup> “the minister’s wife”.

In its first episode, “Thou Shalt Not Talk Smack” (FRESH TV, 2015), no faifāgogo is required with the moral of the story declared upfront. Blending biblical tones with contemporary language, the show demonstrates the crucial role of the church in the lives of Samoans in Aotearoa. Removed from their indigenous context, and several decades post-religious conditioning under the London Missionaries Society, the Samoan connection to a spiritual existence is explicitly preached through the faife’au (church minister) who is treated like a trophy and teleprompter, rather than a vessel for positive change or spiritual nurturance.

Through the forgiving notes of comedy, this episode demonstrates how the church has extended from a place of worship to also behaving as a contemporary replacement for the Samoan village and a battlefield for social standing.

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<sup>22</sup> Faletua is the title given to a Samoan minister’s wife, this is not the character’s actual name.



This live action series dramatises the realities of women's lives in a Samoan church community in South Auckland in a way that few, if any, other shows currently do. It is a necessary offering in the landscape of Samoan storytelling media that meets its community through a cross-platform delivery on both primetime television and *FRESH TV*'s digital channel on *YouTube*. By these means and the *Facebook* plug-in feature to comment when the webisodes are cross-posted to *TheCoconet.TV*'s blog, community can discuss the meaning of its form and function.

However, *FRESH Housewives of South Auckland* and *the Factory* are not designed for the audience to engage with their storyteller, only other members of the audience.

As a result, we witness the effect of technology on the way Samoans select their audiences, tell their stories, the reasons they are telling them, and potentially even the stories they are choosing to share, blending formational with contemporary methodologies and considerations.

#### Memes: #SamoanProblems and "Samoan Quotes & Sayings"

In light of a rising trend in digital media usage among Samoan communities, I will now turn this research to consider an experimental possibility.

It would be easy to dismiss the cultural phenomenon of memes from the legacy of Samoan storytelling. However, when the median age of the ethnic Samoan community in Aotearoa is 21 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013), and the creation and re-production of media designed to spread – 'memes' – is pervasive among Samoan youth, the cultural practice of creating and sharing memes warrants further consideration.

In 1976, the word ‘meme’ was coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* when describing the biological imperative for replication and imitation as a mode of survival:

We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. ‘Mimeme’ comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like ‘gene’. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate to *meme* (2006, p. 192).

In her book constituting the science of memetics, psychologist Susan Blackmore (2000) describes that memes are vehicles used to share and acquire information about any subject – specifically by mode of imitation, “The meme is ‘whatever it is that is passed on by imitation’” (p. 56).

The word ‘meme’ has since been adopted in popular culture in reference to the organic nature by which media spreads, particularly as a joke. Within digital environments, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) describe the meme as the cultural equivalent of a gene – “the smallest evolutionary unit” (p. 18). In this analogy of media and organic processes, memes specifically describe media or media trends that enter the body of public consciousness; that spread, rise and die out with the same rates of ‘infection’ and speed as a virus. This is where we gain the phrase ‘viral media’.

In the scope of this research, I refer to memes as shareable media content in an online, networked environment. Specifically, this research considers memes that appear under the social media hashtag “#SamoanProblems” on *Twitter*, *Instagram*, and under the *Facebook* page “Samoan Quotes & Sayings” (n.d.). Often, memes that appear on other social media platforms are redistributed in *Facebook* social circles of Samoans or group pages.

“Successful memes” are copied and spread subject to the people who encounter and interact with them (Blackmore, 2000, p. 7). Similar to the effect described above of viewers becoming secondary faifāgogo upon re-sharing a story on *Facebook*, the audience “make a conscious decision to pass along relevant files and, in that sense, can be said to “gift” packets of cultural DNA” (Phillips, 2012). Unlike the anonymous *4chan* trolls Phillips writes about in their essay “In Defense of Memes”, audiences in the *Instagram* and *Facebook* space are identifiable to some degree. The act of liking, sharing, or creating original media therefore garners individuated and quantifiable social capital (Ibid); it further acts as a mode of communal affirmation or rejection with values, principles or aspects of Samoan cultural identity expressed in the meme.

On face value, contemporary memes should bear little in common with the formational fāgogo content or principles. In comparison with its content, it is true that the memes reviewed for this research did not bear any *explicit* narratives from the historical Samoan canon. Turning to inspection of the fāgogo principles and methodology, I concede that still images with captions expressing various levels of exasperation or pride do not possess a spoken orality. However, they are distributed on a platform designed for social engagement and negotiation. These memes recognise shared experience, similar to the contemporary digital media reviewed above. And in the qualification of “problems”, an interesting if indirect mode of sociocultural nurturance is underway.

Memes spread—that is, they are actively engaged and/or remixed into existence—because something about a given image or phrase or video or whatever lines up with an already-established set of linguistic and cultural norms (Phillips, 2012).

I propose this is what we are witnessing in the memes of “#SamoanProblems” or “Samoan Quotes and Sayings”. When a screenshotted twitter exchange about Samoan girls having

overprotective brothers goes viral, what we are seeing is a documented manifestation of the feagaiga (covenant) as part of the cultural observance of *vā fealoa'i*. The memefication of that conversation as a viral, shareable digital artefact mythologises the after-effect of the feagaiga. Samoans share it because they can relate to it, even if they cannot put a name to it.

Roland Barthes (1972) described 'myth' as a type of speech, a system of communication that expresses history in certain terms or 'signs'. These signs can only be recognised by insiders who share that history, whom – by their frameworks of knowledge – can re-construct the concept(s) coded through these signs. Barthes uses the example of the feeling, "I love you", and roses. Separately, they are a sentiment (the signified) and a plant (the signifier). But together, the sum of the sentiment and plant form a 'sign' of passion.

If sender and receiver share the same framework of knowledge, the flowers can now perform independently as a sign that "I love you". When utilised and re-iterated in this manner, signs become elevated to the semiological level of myth:

Whether it deals with alphabetical or pictorial writings, myth wants to see in them only the sum of signs, a global sign, the final term of a first semiological chain.... The signifier of myth presents itself in an ambiguous way; it is at the same time meaning and form.... As a total of linguistic signs, the meaning of the myth has its own value, it belongs to a history... in the meaning, a signification is already built and could very well be self-sufficient if myth did not take hold of it (Barthes, 1972, p. 3-5).

Although a sign might have a specific and explicit meaning in Samoan oral traditions, over time and distance, a game of Chinese Whispers comes into effect. Very quickly, the original meaning of the signs imparted through *fāgogo* moves further beyond conscious recall or understanding.

In one *Twitter* exchange between a Polynesian woman and a non-Polynesian man, the non-Polynesian responds to the woman's challenge by citing that Polynesian women have overprotective brothers (Samoan Quotes & Sayings, 2016, 18 May). In this example, the feagaiga (the signified) is protected by her brother; the act of protection becomes the signifier of the feagaiga. The sum of this – the event in action – becomes the sign of the feagaiga. However, over time as the practice perseveres, with a lack of sociocultural education to explain the practice and signified cultural belief underlying it, the original meaning is no longer within reach. We are now left with the myth of the “overprotective Samoan brother”. A twitter exchange documents the myth in action. It goes viral; the myth has become a meme.

Residing in the space between talanoa and fāgogo, digital cultural memes are highly relevant descendants of Samoan storytelling. The content of these hashtag classifiers “#SamoanProblems” and memes on pages such as “Samoan Quotes & Sayings” are performing as case studies of far-removed but persistent nurturance of culture and identity. It is not holistic, it is impoverished of context, but it is present.

## Conclusions

The search through digital media studied the ways in which stories told online by Samoans in Aotearoa are manifesting either historical / formational fāgogo narratives, contemporary fāgogo narratives, historical / formational fāgogo principles, or contemporary principles that served the formational objectives through contemporary means. These four dimensions were chosen to articulate the Su'i fefiloi character of fāgogo as an innovative and dynamic method of Samoan storytelling. It interweaves existing with new narrative material, contexts, tools and technologies in service of sociocultural nurturance reflecting not only who Samoans have been but presently are, and might yet be in the future.

The journey of fāgogo was traced in digital media containing narrative story, song, spoken word, radio play, live performing theatre, the written word (of poetry, short story, novel or transcription of fāgogo), and digital image (moving and still) of both live action and animation style. However, although fāgogo narratives and principles presented themselves in a variety of ways, it was with considerable compromises.

Digital Samoan storytelling in Aotearoa is not yet at a stage where we can say that the fāgogo online perform as fāgogo satisfying historical / formational principles and objectives.

Attempts to digitise fāgogo that were originally produced in an indigenous context have demonstrated that substantial work is required to augment their delivery online. Protections of measina and customary ownership must be mediated on an ongoing basis. It is critical to contextualise fāgogo, or risk distilling their purpose and ability to perform in the complete extent as both a means and method of knowing cultural identity.

Artefacts that rendered historical or formational fāgogo narratives for contemporary straight-to-digital stories demonstrated a similar struggle to contextualise themselves in relation to their origins. Fāgogo narratives told in a non-indigenous digital environment are inherently acts of cultural negotiation. Attempts to distil these for digital consumption by stripping them of their lagi solo or indigenous markers impoverish their ability to perform to the full scope of their purpose.

Fāgogo in any form of media can observe the formational imperatives to connect and nurture discrete and diverse communities of Samoans by utilising all the available tools and techniques of their context. Fāgogo appropriates the narratives of other cultures in service of

its own. Fāgogo indigenises digital social spaces that support conversant modes of connection and storytelling. These are legacies of indigenous Samoan storytelling re-organising and claiming spaces in digital cultures.

Faifāgogo who share contemporary narratives that do not explicitly reference historical Samoan narratives still legitimise the diverse and everyday experiences of contemporary Samoans. This expands the evolving narrative of the Samoan community and Samoan culture.

However, to mindfully negotiate the stories that are told, the ways they are told, and the reasons why, it is necessary to continue acknowledging that digital storytelling takes place within a non-Samoan framework. To exercise agency in the digital environment, digital faifāgogo can guide their practice by articulating the specific Samoan principles or value systems that will underpin their design. It is necessary for the digital faifāgogo to understand these in order to interrogate the digital principles that can best support their implementation. These considerations are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6. DISCUSSION

This research reinforces the statements of previous literature that fāgogo is a critical component of Samoan oral traditions and culture. Fāgogo is both a means and method of knowing Samoan cultural identity (Tui Atua, 2003; Kolone-Collins, 2010; Meleisea et al., 1987; Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, n.d.). When we describe culture as “a way of life”, it is to say that culture is a sum of beliefs, practices and behaviours in everyday life that respond to new contexts and information. Therefore, we understand that cultural identity is not describing characteristics of Samoan life of one era in isolation, but the sum and diversity of Samoan expressions of life throughout history to present day and into the future. The sociocultural composition of Samoan society, and notions of cultural identity are naturally in flux from geographic and social mobility, the changing organisation of social networks and households, cross-cultural marriages and exposure to new worldviews and associated lifestyles (Macpherson, 1999).

For this reason, we can extend our description of fāgogo as a means and method of knowing – that is, recognising, negotiating and developing – Samoan cultural identity. Fāgogo therefore functions as a reflection of this process through both the subjects Samoans feature in their stories, and the way those stories are told. Through the Su’i fefiloi character of fāgogo, reaching back through history to interweave and reconcile it with the present, we can still access cultural memory, indigenous values and knowledge. Through fāgogo we can place them in context, and negotiate our understanding of their place and utility in our present and future lives.

The principles of formational fāgogo describe that fāgogo is didactic, inherently experimental, intertextual, reiterative and adaptive. Its storytellers work with their audience to



determine the nature and conclusion of a story. This research sought to understand what fāgogo looks like in the twenty-first century environment of digital media in Aotearoa when exposed to the potential of distributed networks and social spaces. As mentioned earlier in this research, with Samoans' adoption of digital tools, techniques and technologies, the search for the digital fāgogo is a study of how Samoans in Aotearoa are indigenising these in a su'ifefiloi, remixing, intersecting and, at times, even subverting Western storytelling frameworks online.

Despite fears that the historical practice of fāgogo is on the decline, Samoans continue telling stories and are also utilising digital spaces to do so. However, we are also witnessing a transition in faifāgogo from the grandparents and older generations to the younger generations who are becoming the digital faifāgogo. The repercussions and potential value of what may be lost in the transitional period is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this research.

Case studies of Samoan stories in Aotearoa's digital media have demonstrated that fāgogo narratives and principles are persevering in these non-indigenous environments, even while using non-indigenous media forms and narratives. However, these have been with compromise. As a result, none of the media studied can be said to have utilised digital frameworks in a contextually-meaningful way that still uphold the formational objectives (sociocultural nurturance) and values fostered by fāgogo (vā tapuia, vā fealoa'i, alofa fetufaa'i).

### What is the relationship between ‘digital’ and ‘historical / formational’ fāgogo?

For the ease of reference, I briefly reiterate that a fāgogo is the historically oral means and method of nurturing Samoan cultural identity through storytelling. These stories were historically interlaced with song, chant, poetry, and delivered at night by elders or parents for young children. The scope of these stories was historically intertextual and could include creative work (tala fatu), stories handed down between generations (tala tu’u), Bible stories (tala Tusi Paia), and myths and legends.

A ‘digital fāgogo is a fāgogo designed natively within and for the digital, networked environment to fulfil historically formational fāgogo principles.

As a function of this research, I have been given the opportunity to address a concern that technology is driving historical fāgogo’s decline. While it is true that the historical practice of fāgogo as documented by Moyle (1981) is not practised as widely within Samoa as it once was (Kolone-Collins, 2010; Mesmer, 2016), communities recognise that there is still value in fāgogo and its historical practice (Mesmer, 2016; Tautunu, personal communication, April 7, 2016).

In her presentation at TEDxTauranga, Jody Jackson-Becerra (TEDx Talks, 2016) specifically challenges families to take the time out from technology to sit down and weave stories together. Jackson-Becerra demonstrates two modes of fāgogo in her presentation: the historical one-to-many ratio of a singular faifāgogo with an audience, and a second round robin method of storytelling wherein each member of the audience is also a faifāgogo, sharing the role by contributing a few lines to the narrative before passing it on. Arguing that fāgogo is an instrumental means of unlocking children’s imagination, capacity for

communication and sharing, Jackson-Becerra states that it also effectively removes barriers and teaches children to express themselves, regardless of their background or the context in which she delivers fāgogo. This follows Jackson-Becerra's concern that children are not tapping into the potential of their imagination in an age where they're surrounded by gadgets and apps, and performing as passive consumers of media, rather than actively expressing themselves.

So, is the digital fāgogo attempting to replace historical fāgogo?

When this question has been posed to me over the last two years, it has been with the tenor of a nostalgic return to “the old ways”. Of course, there is an opportunity for digital technologies to spread an awareness of what, how and why historically formational fāgogo was practised, as we have seen in the digital media of *Malaga*: a fāgogo within a fāgogo that drew attention to the self-aware and resampling nature of Samoa's storytelling legacy. A digital extension of this legacy could be explored using a variety of multimedia and interactive methods. However, I contend that there is no artificial construct that can replace the connection between two or more people physically inhabiting the same space to share memory, knowledge, alofa and mana.

A digital method and means of fāgogo can supplement the historical oral practice or emulate its intentions: to nurture the young and provide a pointer to the way “home” through stories that creatively reflect on our social realities and impart lessons. But when we speak of “home”, we are again speaking metaphorically about that place where we find shelter and are nurtured; that place where we find community and belonging. In the twenty-first century, with Samoans spread around the globe, “pointing home” is about providing connection and

visibility to the diversity of the global Samoan experience both as it currently is, and historically was – to the best of our memory.

With our numbers thinning of elders willing or able to share their indigenous knowledge, one of the best functions that digital technologies and participatory storytelling principles<sup>23</sup> can provide is to help communities remember.

Through media designed to spread easily (*spreadability*), Samoan communities can find storied memories across time and distance, to remember not only what has come before, but preserve what we presently know in preparation for times ahead. Any Samoan can emerge from the audience to be a faifāgogo and contribute to the *world building* of a cultural narrative. This will illustrate the *subjectivity* of our experiences to stir each other's memories, shape what we want to be remembered (Purcell Sjölund, 2013), and – very importantly – how.

To this extent, a digital practice of fāgogo (a digital fāgogo) seeks to nurture Samoan cultural identity in two primary ways: by preserving the past, and reconciling with the present, both in service of the future. It will do this through stories designed natively for the digital, networked environment with didactic entertainment that can encourage creativity and imagination.

When we discuss the potential of designing a “digital fāgogo”, we mean empowering the existing habits and cultures of Samoan audiences online. We’re talking about producing

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<sup>23</sup> Henry Jenkins’ principles of transmedia storytelling: spreadability, drillability, continuity, multiplicity, immersion, extractability, worldbuilding, seriality, subjectivity, and performance.

stories with the community for the community; stories with the diversity of styles and narratives determined by the equally diverse Samoan community, that will reach them wherever they are online. It is about designing narrative experiences that are culturally-sensitive, that help us connect with and nurture our culture. It is about using digital storytelling principles to empower Samoan agendas, rather than accepting the opinion that foreign technology will unravel Samoan culture.

### Historical fāgogo that preserve the past

Digital media such as the *Fāgogo. Fables of Samoa, Myths and Legends of Ancient Samoa* and the *Rays of Sound Project* have shown that tertiary institutions<sup>24</sup> are in an ideal position to support projects preserving formational fāgogo as artefacts of cultural heritage. However, such projects suffer when fāgogo are preserved without details capturing their original context and the lagi solo – the catalysts – for those stories.

If formational fāgogo are performed in the indigenous context, and are intended to function as digital fāgogo, their online delivery must consider frameworks that will support the retention of fāgogo's formational principles. To perform as an artefact that nurtures social and cultural awareness, the fāgogo's context must be made apparent. It must employ a conversant style of engagement that enables the faifāgogo to directly discuss and negotiate understanding with the audience, as close to direct interpersonal contact as possible. It must enable the audience to converse with one another. If the fāgogo contains historical content, it must illustrate how the fāgogo functions as an artefact of history enhancing the audience's understanding of Samoan culture and / or indigenous oral traditions.

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<sup>24</sup> Victoria University of Wellington produced the *Myths and Legends of Ancient Samoa* under the New Zealand Electronic Text Collection and *Rays of Sound Project* (through the Language Learning Center). The University of Auckland produced the *Fāgogo. Fables of Samoa* (through the online Archive of Maori and Pacific Music).

Various digital media in this research demonstrated degrees of such connectivity, by allowing the audience to engage with each other and the faifāgogo through the use of digital social spaces and social media. However, a pervasive issue with all these case studies was the lack of a supporting framework that placed these fāgogo in context.

Borrowing from transmedia principles of *drillability*, *immersion*, *multiplicity* and *worldbuilding*, it is possible to provide media or design interaction(s) that supplement the experience of a fāgogo and build context of the village it came from, the faifāgogo who provided that specific account, and any other version of the narratives that might add further detail or promote discussion. By observing the *extractability* of a fāgogo, we can determine what lessons should be imparted as knowledge or artefacts of media. Examples of this principle can be seen in the Victoria University of Wellington's provision of quizzes and word studies in their *Legend of Sina and the Eel* that gamify the learning experience and acquisition of language. These supplementary experiences also reinforced this fāgogo as an artefact of indigenous Samoan oral tradition that provided an origin story for the coconut, rooted with video footage of the fāgogo's real world locations. If we want the lessons of such fāgogo to spread easily (*spreadability*), these fāgogo can be analysed for elements (such as proverbs, lagi, or tagi) that can be extracted in spreadable media. These extractable forms of media can be supplemented with meta information or through channels enabling later audiences to trace those media back to the original fāgogo. The traceability in a shareable artefact is critical in order for context to be re-established with ease.

Can fāgogo captured from custodians beyond reach of the digital environment still perform as fāgogo in the holistic sense online? Understanding that each fāgogo is unique to a village

with accents, narratives and styles that allow each origin to be made distinct, it is ideal for that fāgogo to preserve any such attributes in its digitisation. However, even though each iteration of a fāgogo is unique, there is an attitude among some Samoans that certain formational fāgogo belong to districts, villages or families. If we accept that everyone who encounters that fāgogo becomes a faifāgogo in the act of sharing or contributing to it, this concern must be mediated between the source and its digitisers or redistributors. In the act of digitisation, we exercise the ability to negotiate meaning and understanding by weighing the integrity of the evidence or multiple narratives presented. As radio plays from the Language Learning Center demonstrate, a digital fāgogo benefits when it is designed with awareness of its media and associated frameworks, and of its ability to travel and be accessed in different contexts (*spreadability*).

For lack of a faifāgogo in real time, a digitised historical fāgogo can be enhanced in principle by a framework that allows the audience to test the memory and understanding of extractable lessons through experiences such as quizzes and questionnaires. This framework integrates *performance* and experimental ways for different media to allow deeper *immersion* into the storytelling design, creating spaces and ways for the audience to perform actions, such as conversing with the storyteller(s) or other audience members, sharing personal reflections and learning by social negotiation and construction. Digital social spaces designed for interaction can facilitate conversant modes of storytelling, teasing out riddles and morals, clarifying allegories, symbols, motifs and understanding. It can extend the historical attitude towards fāgogo as an educational mode primarily for children, to recognise adults in their audience as well.

Furthermore, digital tools have the potential to support the multiplicitous nature of historically established fāgogo. These are fāgogo shared by multiple villages, resulting in multiple continuities (*multiplicity*<sup>25</sup>). These multiple versions exist within the native oral context as a function of legitimisation (Meleisea et al., 1987, p. 10). Online arguments among the Samoan community have been known to follow the sharing of historical fāgogo, regarding the verity or completeness of an account, in the suggestion that only one true version may exist. However, the decentralised nature of hierarchies and control in digital cultures discharge this necessity. It is possible that future projects might document and present multiple versions of a fāgogo alongside each other for community discussion and live negotiation.

The internet is modular and networked, designed for quick revision, additions and collaboration. This brings to light considerations of quality assurance and creative control: who should have the ability to add or modify content, and who should rule on such admissions? How might Samoan communities organise themselves online to deliberate and rule on such decisions? These are questions that only the Samoan community can answer through time and practise.

Once the fāgogo is underway, its performance or delivery is an ongoing negotiation between the audiences who may carry any foreknowledge of its narrative, and un-inducted newcomers to the story (Fonoti, personal communication, April 5, 2016). Historical fāgogo provides an introductory framework for newcomers but, like all stories with intertextual reference, fāgogo

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<sup>25</sup> Henry Jenkins' transmedia storytelling principles of performance, immersion and multiplicity are discussed in the chapter on *Context Review Through Literature*.



privileges i) those with foreknowledge of the narrative, ii) the Samoan culture to which it belongs and, iii) other Pacific Ocean cultures that move through their stories.

The power dynamics afforded by fāgogo's recursive and evolutionary nature between faifāgogo and different villages provide further opportunities to disrupt dominant narratives and concepts, even from within Samoa's own power structures. When the agency to tell and improvise upon a story is common practice within a cultural framework, attempts to centralise power or control perceptions about who we are, what we know and what stories can be told will encounter continuous disruption: "The ways we perform reflect our negotiation of the ways to tell stories" (Fonoti, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

This power distribution is in constant negotiation as the fāgogo and its practice travel and respond to new environments. Fonoti described this practice as one that pays specific attention to both how the story is told and received. The roles of faifāgogo and audience are fluid and flexible, not only in the course of a single telling, but over generations as stories are inherited, exchanged, and passed on.

### Contemporary fāgogo that reconcile with the present

Digital media serving as fāgogo with contemporary narratives can capture our historical narratives about key aspects of Samoan culture (*The Legend of Sina and the Eel* by G56 Creative and the Victoria University of Wellington, *The Legend of the Cannibal King*, *Sau Fuga Sina*, *Surfing for Sina*), indigenise foreign narratives (*Island Time*), and reflect our contemporary realities in the diaspora (*Faitoto'a o le Alofa*, *The Factory Story*, *Baby Mama's Club*, *FRESH Housewives of South Auckland*, and *#SamoaProblems*).

Fāgogo can empower Samoan audiences in the appropriation of tools, technologies and frameworks for our own narratives and objectives. As seen in artefacts of the *School Journals* written locally for Samoan children (Kruse-Va'ai, personal communication, April 7, 2016), such fāgogo defy perceptions that established cultures surrounding non-indigenous art forms and media cannot intersect with Samoan culture, and still be “appropriate” for those media cultures. They achieve this by appropriating the “language” and media of those very art forms to undermine and subvert dominant discourses in those fields, and by using the introduced “language” or art forms “to articulate a sense of culture and place” for the individual within the global Samoan narrative (Kruse-Va'ai, 2011, p. 136). These were particularly relevant to the counter-colonial movement within Samoa that rose in response to the language and tools directly introduced in the early twentieth century (Ibid). However, the postcolonial ripples of narrative renegotiation did not end once Samoans left Samoa and bore new generations in the diaspora.

The “literature” of a globalised media culture can easily play into the political myth of a default narrative, standards and practices for any form of media, “text” or “literature”, but once these are introduced into the everyday lived culture of an individual or community, everything becomes negotiable and is subsequently negotiated.

Acts of creation in digital participatory cultures are acts of survival, sustaining and nurturing a community's existence. Members of a community create not only for a public, but perform a reconstitution of their community with each act of production and reproduction (Stanfill, 2013), passing on and / or diversifying the creatives genes of a culture with each act. This reaffirms or renegotiates the community's existence and membership. These communities come into being as a public body when they are addressed “by a circular text” as an imagined

body, “circularity [of media, and in this case fāgogo] is essential to the phenomenon”

(Warner, 2005 as cited in Stanfill, 2013) that binds a community together. As Albert Wendt once said, “We are what we remember”:

The kinds of content that are most spreadable, Jenkins, Ford, and Green posit, include collective values and fantasies, humor, parody and shared references, ambiguous or unfinished narratives, mysteries, controversies, and rumors. To be spreadable, content must also be movable, reusable, and part of a larger flow of content (Click, 2013).

The narrative and collective identity of the online Samoan community is negotiated with every circulation of a fāgogo or media “text”. This provides the opportunity to affirm self-proclaimed members, recognise the new, and empowers all to articulate the ways they distinguish themselves (Ibid). By determining their own criteria for belonging, Samoan communities can enlist digital frameworks to recognise and address the diverse components of its global identity. Awareness of this will allow creators to re-think the common approach of valuing one audience over others, as Jenkins, Ford, & Green (2013) contend that the contemporary media consumption environment has “both fragmented audiences and normalized cult behaviors”. Digital fāgogo producers must explore models that invite and support the diverse ways and forms of engaging with the online Samoan community. These models must explore flexibility to facilitate growth and adaptation to their audience, and design frameworks that value the activities inspired by the fāgogo.

When *TheCoconet.TV* integrated its comment function with *Facebook*, this reflected an awareness of where most “Kiwi Pacific” audiences reside in digital social spaces. This technical integration bridges the distance between audience and faifāgogo. It provides the community with a degree of ownership over *theCoconet.TV*’s content, as their public discussions influence the selection of feature stories (personal communication, June 19, 2016).

There is an element of distance that exists between the faifāgogo and their audience in both the historical and digital context. However, when we consider the ingrained pursuit of reciprocity between faifāgogo and audience in historical practice, we understand that this engagement is an endeavour to close that distance. Conversant exchanges and contributions are a critical element required for the story to continue -- not only in the moment (when the “‘aue” no longer comes, the faifāgogo storyteller has either lost the listeners’ attention or sent them to sleep), but for future generations to emerge from the audience as participants or faifāgogo themselves.

We must move away from the assumption that audiences are passive consumers, but also recognise that Samoan communities may experience digital cultures in different ways to non-Samoans. Jenkins, Ford, & Green (2013) describe that audiences can participate in a range of roles in relation to each form of media, on a spectrum of using to producing. Online audiences can flow between these roles, similar to audiences of fāgogo. Digital fāgogo projects must recognise and facilitate this fluidity by understanding how their audiences interact with different media in different contexts. Audiences will spread the content most relevant to their lives, therefore it is critical for producers to understand their audiences and empower them to also become producers:

Spreadable media flows are grassroots and multimodal; they connect citizens in countries shunned by multinational conglomerates who see no opportunities for profit and where media circulation has thus been imbalanced and uneven (Click, 2013).

Robert Pratten (2011), insisted that participation is at the heart of transmedia storytelling. If we blend this notion with lessons learned through case studies and talanoaga with participants, this allows us to suggest that one key goal of digital fāgogo is to foster well-networked communities of Samoans online, in order to empower their growth and agency for storytelling at the intersection of Samoan and digital cultures. Digital fāgogo should produce functional

frameworks online where the storyteller and audience share in creative production and ownership, a fluid exchange of roles that – if so desired by the storyteller – can happen in real time.

This can be addressed not only with participatory principles of production, but a participatory mode of storytelling that engages with the audience. This will allow the faifāgogo to learn from them as the story unfolds, and thus recognise the audience's emergence as co-performers. This has been demonstrated implicitly in every Samoan story that was deployed on a digital social network (*The Turtle and the Shark*, *Island Time*, *Faitoto'a o le Alofa*), on a platform integrated with such a network (*Surfing for Sina*), or both (*The Factory Story*, *The Legend of Sina and the Eel*, *Sau Fuga Sina*, *The Legend of the Cannibal King*, *FRESH Housewives of South Auckland*). This invitation to perform, participate and create has also been explicit in such contemporary examples as *Baby Mama's Club*, where the show's producers and writers have released multiple invitations for the audience to share their views and contribute to the nature and content of the show (BabyMamas Club, 2016, September 20; BabyMamas Club, 2016, October 4; Baby Mama's Club, 2016, October 12).

The ability to easily engage, interact with and re-distribute fāgogo must factor as a key consideration of *performance* into the design principles. Just as historical faifāgogo relied on their suite of oral tools and techniques, an accomplished digital faifāgogo must understand the historical intentions and use of the creative social spaces where their audiences are spending time online. Furthermore, they must also consider the potential ways of claiming those spaces for their community, even if such pathways are beyond the original design of non-indigenous media and their associated frameworks, subverting their original purpose.

Remuneration and funding are pragmatic concerns to be mediated with social, familiar and cultural responsibilities moving forward. The longevity of hub platforms such as *TheCoconet.TV* is predicated on their ability to forecast and adapt to emerging uses of digital media with audiences, their mobility and cultures. Due to the apparent concentration of activity and residence among Pacific Island audiences on *Facebook*, it is reasonable for *TheCoconet.TV* to continue nurturing that platform before considering the best application and expansion of their auxiliary social spaces. Gaining an understanding of each platform's purpose and its usage in Pacific Island communities will enable platforms like the *TheCoconet.TV* to diversify their content and engage their audiences in unprecedented ways, such as bridging between Pacific and non-Pacific Island audiences within Aotearoa.

### Linguistic accessibility

Digital fāgogo affords the opportunity for new and accessible forms of storytelling, with potential for the Samoan language to be presented in ways that privilege its audience at multiple levels of linguistic competency, sourcing content from their own environments, with terms, motifs and settings familiar and valuable to them. As a mode of language sustainment, a digital fāgogo could be produced in both Samoan and non-Samoan languages with graduated degrees of difficulty to function as a resource to both Samoan and English-speaking Samoans (e.g. *Rays of Sound*, *Fāgogo*. *Fables of Samoa*).

### Technical accessibility

The global dispersion of Samoan and Pacific Island communities leaves some of its members with limited access to affordable or reliable internet connectivity and technical infrastructures (Taouma, personal communication, June 19, 2016). This influences the nature of narrative experiences that can be accessed by these groups and reveals an imperative to produce

meaningful content that retains high standards, but considers the challenges of technical accessibility by its potential audience(s), e.g. digital artefacts with low bandwidth demands, such as photo or written blog posts. Media such as these have experienced high success with audiences of *TheCoconet.TV* (Ibid).

Furthermore, despite the popularity of *Facebook* among Pacific Island audiences, this platform presents a challenge to historical fāgogo practice. Historically, fāgogo nurtured the very young first, but *Facebook*'s terms and conditions require its users be aged thirteen and above. Stories in socially networked environments must consider any such ethical, legal and logistical barriers for their target audience(s) in their design.

### Ethical considerations of multicultural negotiation

For fāgogo to effectively pursue its sociocultural objectives online, it must be designed in ways that negotiate the cultural interplay of a foreign digital environment, and gives priority to Samoan audiences. The choice to privilege an audiences of ethnic minorities in mainstream media and modes is a conscious reversal of postcolonial power dynamics between former colonies and their colonial powers. Placing the agency of the story's subjects within the hands of their Samoan storytellers allows the faifāgogo to mitigate conversations about "appropriateness" by narrating to and from a shared culture.

Stories designed 'from the outside in' (such as Western-European speaking about Samoan culture) risk compromising indigenous ways of knowing and understanding that nuance fāgogo and its subject matter in specific contexts. This risk can be reduced if the source community is prioritised as the target audience and included in key decision-making as collaborators.

In their book, *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins, Ford, & Green (2013) sought to understand the movements of media content in networked communities. They argued that there is a fundamental difference in the attitude of most media producers in contrast to their audiences. Media producers are often big firms whose decisions are guided by profit and a culture of commodities. Online cultures of audiences, however, participate by the logic of reciprocity and “gift culture” that allows content to be created and spread with greater freedom due to the high value of exposure and social recognition. This resonates with Samoa’s historical values of alofa fetufaa’i (reciprocity) and argues that digital culture manifests our organic (and highly dynamic) nature of conversation:

The way we engage each other online—whether that’s words, images, music, GIFs, etc.—, is more of a conversation than a broadcast, more an act of sharing than of documentation. This will be especially true as more people speaking languages with no formal written form come online—and when we talk about the “next billion” to come online, it’s largely those folks. So we should expect more oral traditions in digital form in the coming years (mina, 2015).

Jenkins, Ford, & Green (2013) maintain that in this economy of reciprocity, it is not commercial but cultural “residual value” that motivates and provides context to an audience’s evaluation of media. This “residual value” can arise from nostalgia for or making “new” discoveries of past materials. In the context of fāgogo, this includes indigenous knowledge and past experiences of the audience. This has been witnessed in *TheCoconet.TV* through the success of “heritage pieces” that have enjoyed some of the highest viewership of all their available media (Taouma, personal communication, June 19, 2016).

Jenkins, Ford, & Green (2013) state that in a “spreadable business model” that tries to maximise the benefits of the logic of reciprocity in a “gift economy”, audiences enjoy



important agency through their collaboration with producers in the production, distribution and promotion of media. To support collaboration, people need to be able to easily find each other's work and identify a means that allows them to work together. Designing for this can enable digital fāgogo producers to design projects that teach Samoan communities about cultural heritage and technical skills in narrative, and ethical considerations that are bound in historical and contemporary understandings of tapu, and of fāgogo measina vs contemporary fāgogo.

Notions of “indigenous heritage” or “indigenous intellectual property” diverge from the individual or organisation-based models of authorship and property typically used to inform intellectual property policies. These indigenous models do not “map evenly” onto “digital fan cultures of production” (Stanfill, 2013). Qualities resonate between digital fan culture and indigenous production of certain creative work online: work is shared with more freedom among members of the community, contributing to the larger concept of the gift economy (Stanfill, 2013). The free circulation of creative work produces more communal and less individualistic formations that “do not look like property at all to us” (Rose, 1998, p. 140 as cited in Stanfill, 2013). In the same way, some indigenous forms of property have not been intelligible as “ownership” because they are internally understood as more like guardianship (Tan, 2013). Fortunately, successful precedents of such non-commercial ventures with Pacific Island audiences have been set (Harris, 2003; Saifoloi et al., 2016; Taouma, personal communication, June 19, 2016).

Tan (2013) makes the distinction between “commons” as understood by Maori and non-Maori: there is a Maori commons space of use which is (relatively) free on the inside, subject to internal custom and protocol. Samoan indigenous cultural heritage or “measina” may

prove similar. Unlike standard Western property, for those villages or families claiming guardianship over specific fāgogo, creative digital endeavours will require further mediation and consideration.

If a digital fāgogo model should develop with a dimension of remuneration, a culturally appropriate, collectivist model should be informed by Samoan social structures, to allow the villages or cultural custodians to be included in any remuneration models. However, when such bodies operate as decision makers, the qualitative time required to mediate with such committees may find tension with the emphasis on timely efficiency of Western business models that rarely account for such negotiation in their budgets.

It is a sophisticated challenge that necessitates the inclusion of Samoan audiences and target communities to mitigate and inform the planning of such projects, the selection of stories, their design and execution. It requires mindful integration of such associated activities in logistical planning of scope, schedule, budgeting, and defining criteria of acceptance.

Telling Samoan stories in a culturally-sensitive way empowers Samoan perspectives about the place, role and value of stories in society. An example has already been made of fāgogo that present multiple versions or continuities as a means of legitimisation to multiple parties (Meleisea et al., 1987, p. 10). Cultural sensitivity is particularly important for such fāgogo not only out of customary respect, but in recognition that disclosure and circulation can have social and economic consequences for the affected parties. These considerations should be treated with utmost priority by providing those affected with the agency to determine what is told, how and why. When producing fāgogo that deal with such considerations, the affected parties should be viewed as both producers and key members of the audience.

Another related ethical consideration arises in experimental approaches to engaging with Samoan audiences. When it was revealed that Sophia Folau's *Facebook* appeal for help was a work of fiction for webseries *Baby Mama's Club*, reactions from the public were mixed, from relief and amusement, to negative impressions of having been deceived or "lied to" by the showrunners. Despite the Pacific Island community's long-standing relationship with *Facebook*, I have not found a previous record of storytelling projects in Aotearoa that have used digital social spaces in such a manner. It is highly probable that Samoan and Pacific Island audiences are unaccustomed to being drawn into a story without their awareness or consent; it is not an apparent custom in approaches to Samoan storytelling. The new experience from *Baby Mama's Club* was guaranteed to be met with some level of discomfort, due to its unfamiliarity, the initial self-misrepresentation, and the sensitivity of the subject at hand.

Significantly, the classification of the filmed appeal / marketing campaign as a "social experiment" brings into play power dynamics of covert observation and the control of information. These are of particular concern when dealing with postcolonial, ethnic or minority communities that may not have historically enjoyed equal degrees of agency, self-determination or access to information to make informed choices. It seems ironic that a fāgogo seeking to renegotiate these dimensions for its audience, would temporarily withhold them from that same audience. To their credit, the show's writers and actors disclosed the true nature of their campaign within less than a week of the original appeal. While apologising for any offence caused, the team insist that the long-term benefits they are pursuing to raise awareness and open discussion justify any short-term discomfort.

Future digital faifāgogo seeking to experiment with ways of engaging their audience will benefit from articulating the distinct value systems for each Pacific Island culture they are approaching. This will be instrumental in navigating culturally-sensitive experiments and to mitigate breaches in social dynamics and boundaries, particularly for socially-observant members of the audience.

This highlights the crucial and active role of the audience in the fāgogo method. It recognises the importance of a mutual understanding and trust between audience and storytellers. The roles included under the title of digital storytellers refer to those who determine the final creative output: the writers, directors and/or producers. With the example of Samoan storytelling, a digital faifāgogo may seek to align their practice with principles of Teu Le Vā, fostering a connection between audience and storytellers to find a middle ground that nurtures the wellbeing and growth of both parties. Decisions within this agreement should focus on protecting the fāgogo material and all affected parties from exploitation, manipulation or misrepresentation.

## Conclusions

In the development of any future digital fāgogo, how will we know when it is ‘good’ or achieving its sociocultural nurturance? In his comparative essay of Pacific literature, Vilsoni Hereniko (Hereniko & Wilson, 1999) states that Pacific literature can best foster an understanding of native art forms for both indigenous and diasporic Pacific communities, when their measures of quality and success reflect inwards to its members:

For me, Pacific writing in English (and perhaps postcolonial writing in general) is best evaluated by the extent to which the writer has increased our understanding of ourselves or aspects of our universe as well as the chosen art form -- whether it is a poem, short story, play, novel or whatever. Our heightened awareness may come from

one or all of the following, and more: the cultural, ethnic, or political sensibilities portrayed in the work; the successful synthesis, or use, of oral and written traditions; the personal choice and treatment of subject or theme; the innovative use of the English language; the unique form or structure of the art; the use of original or unusual literary elements and techniques; even the challenge to literary hegemony. A poem that makes us reflect; a short story that illuminates dark corners of our experience; a novel or play that challenges the norm by offering an alternative that, in one's opinion, is better, is a work that is worth the label 'literature' (Hereniko & Wilson, 1999, p. 49).

A digital fāgogo “literature” must also enable its community to self-determine its own yardstick and measures of quality. It must be informed, but measured and amended in practice to remain relevant. A digital fāgogo must adapt when practiced in the diaspora and when online, using non-indigenous media and their associated frameworks. This should reflect the language and customs that incorporate the everyday realities of Samoan diasporic audiences. It is necessary for fāgogo to continue serving the Samoan community, to inform and negotiate what changes or remains unchanged in Samoan relationships, positions, and places of belonging that address their changing contexts. Fāgogo as a historical and contemporary mode of ethnic sociocultural nurturance will therefore perform at an ongoing intersection between ethnic cultural heritage and contemporary media environments. The key principles informing such a design are presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7. CONCLUSIONS

This research explored contemporary digital media of Aotearoa for historical narratives and principles of fāgogo, a critical component of indigenous Samoan storytelling. Out of respect for these Samoan oral culture, I decided to build upon the available literature by sharing talanoa with scholars and practitioners of fāgogo, which proved to be an invaluable exercise. Articulating the role of fāgogo with my participants reaffirmed the ongoing value of negotiating knowledge in this manner for research pertaining to our Samoan communities and oral culture, even in the diaspora.

This not only provided an updated account of my findings from the literature, but allowed diverse perspectives and disciplines to articulate the social role played by fāgogo: one of a creative connection in Samoan society between villages, generations of families, and Samoan communities. Fāgogo is a method and means of su'i fefiloi: a call-and-response style of storytelling that interweaves with and adapts to new contexts as both entertainment and education. It encourages creativity and nurtures imagination. It carries, reflects and negotiates changes in social mores, values and customs. While commonly perceived as targeted primarily at the very young, the transition of faifāgogo from the elders to the young generations is also witnessing a broadening of audiences to include older age groups.

From these talanoa with my scholars and practitioners, classifications were developed to analyse digital media by Samoans in Aotearoa: *historical /formational vs contemporary fāgogo content*, and *historical /formational vs. contemporary fāgogo principles*. These media were considered with respect to the ways that stories were told online, what stories were told, and why.

Of the stories told by Samoans within Aotearoa's digital culture, or brought into their ecosystem of stories shared online, fāgogo manifested in two primary categories: fāgogo that explicitly reference Samoa's indigenous oral traditions and history, and fāgogo that reflect contemporary life and concerns. Common to both forms was their intention to nurture an awareness and understanding of Samoans' lived experiences, providing dignity and legitimacy to these realities. In all these fāgogo, we can glean direct or indirect commentary, even the erosion, of historical Samoan values of vā tapuia, vā fealoa'i and alofa fetufaa'i. The stylistic variety of these narratives reflects the diverse contexts of their faifāgogo: circumstances and cultures at a certain time and place, and the influence of the available storytelling tools on the way a story was told.

However, delivery of these media online also highlighted significant challenges to their fulfilment of historical fāgogo principles. Transposing a historical fāgogo online can divorce it from its cultural framework and context, inhibiting its ability to achieve its historical objectives of nurturing sociocultural wellbeing through discussion of a fāgogo's broader contexts. Likewise, relaying a contemporary or contemporised fāgogo online can still fail to perform as a fāgogo if it does not utilise those digital social spaces in a culturally-sensitive and responsible way, limiting its pursuit of vā tapuia and historical fāgogo principles.

In response to these findings, I propose the following to support conscious and culturally-principled approaches to telling fāgogo in online, digital frameworks.

### Five Principles for a Digital Fāgogo

The following principles are divided into the following sections: what, how and why.

What do we tell?

***Su'i fefiloi or Interweave (stories that interweave)***

The ability to interweave a mixture of different ideas, narratives, types of media and their associated frameworks is a critical quality for a digital faifāgogo. In line with Kolone-Collins's thesis (2010), a digital fagogo may include, but not be limited to, narratives that are original creative works (tala fatu), stories handed down between generations (tala tu'u), that reference Biblical texts (tala Tusi Paia), or Samoa's indigenous oral history and origin stories (tala o le vavau). Fāgogo are inherently experimental, and there is no prescriptive structure, as it adapts to new contexts. However, the digital faifāgogo must demonstrate an awareness of the Samoan community's use of digital media and their associated frameworks, to apply them effectively.

The Su'i fefiloi character of digital fāgogo refers not only to narrative content, but the way it must perform in a digital environment. Due to our distributed Samoan communities around the world, there is an increasing reliance on digital technologies to find each other. The media of a digital fāgogo will ideally be designed to spread easily, but will always be traceable to its origins and context.

***Education (stories that educate)***

The digital fāgogo must impart some form of lesson, whether history, cultural customs, values, principles, or simple fictional accounts that broaden the audience's awareness of the world and the diversity of the Samoan community. The fāgogo is a culturally-specific mode of creatively negotiating social realities and fostering connection. It must provide its audience with the opportunity to learn something. In so doing, a digital fāgogo must use digital tools, techniques or technologies to indicate its context if it is considered measina by its source(s)



(e.g. from which village or family, told by who and when), or created in response to any other fāgogo (e.g. multiple continuities or a story that needs to be understood in relation to other fāgogo or media). This may bring a digital fāgogo into contention with highly abstract forms of art and storytelling where the artefact is deliberately subjective or requires a framework of knowledge not within reach of the digital fāgogo media.

For explicitly pedagogical fāgogo such as those that reference and seek to impart Samoa's material culture, historical narratives or indigenous oral traditions, I recommend they are delivered with media that consider the following aspects, as inspired by Temukisa Laban-Alama (n.d):

- material should be bilingual;
- multimedia: aural and written at the minimum;
- identify the target learning demographic;
- state the values highlighted by the fāgogo (e.g. innovation, inquiry; diversity; equity);
- state the key competencies fostered (e.g. managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing; thinking; using language, symbols and texts);
- state the achievement objectives (e.g. achievements specific to the selected media forms for the fāgogo); and
- state the learning outcomes (the ability to identify the features distinct to Samoa; the opportunity celebrate specific aspects of Samoan culture; the ability to create appropriate media that express the ideas).

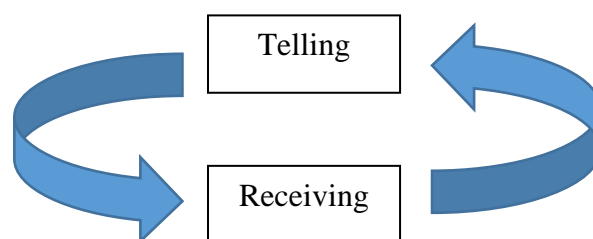
It is possible that each storyteller or faifāgogo could draw their audience's attention to different values, principles and lessons, seeking to nurture different competencies or

objectives. This could also be altered with respect for each audience in question, in response to recent conflicts or concerns. For this reason, it would be misleading to provide a static storytelling framework suggesting a singular core set of values. Rather, if online fāgogo was enabled within an interactive framework allowing the audience to augment the baseline with divergent details, endings, and value sets for the audience to take away, this could provide a comprehensive cultural context designed to grow with each new individual or group who encounters the fāgogo. This will also account for fāgogo with multiple versions either due to inter-village dispute or natural evolution of oral re-telling.

How do we tell it?

### ***Collaboration***

Digital fāgogo are told in collaboration with their audiences through ongoing call and response. Audiences must have one or more means to influence, contribute to or add upon a digital fāgogo, and may emerge as faifāgogo in their own right, before, during and after its delivery. Digital frameworks must be utilised to enable the collaborative fluidity of roles, such as in the following manner:



*Figure 1. The fluid and collaborative nature of fāgogo storytelling culture.*

The ways of engaging must be easy to recognise and meaningful for their target audience, requiring the least amount of effort to participate. Digital culture arguably alters the nature of

the vā fealoa’i historically observed through exchanges in-person, whether between a grandparent and their kin, or an unfamiliar faifāgogo to their audience. Digital fāgogo must negotiate the barrier of technology to work with such considerations, and propose creative ways of bridging the space between.

### **Conversation**

Together with collaboration, a digital fāgogo must provide the audience with a means to interrogate the meaning and their own understanding of the fāgogo. Historically, this conversation occurred after the delivery of a fāgogo, but digital faifāgogo may decide to disrupt this expectation. This is a critical component that is lacking in many non-Samoan forms of indigenous media, but is required in reflection of Samoa’s communal and collective cultures of storytelling.

Why do we tell it in these ways?

### ***Fa’afailelega (Nourishment)***

As mentioned under the *didactic* imperative and expounded by Kolone-Collins (2010), it is critical for fāgogo to impart lessons and nurture the character of the Samoan community. This is no different in a digital fāgogo practice. However, what digital faifāgogo tell and how they tell it should be guided by principles that prioritise Samoan audiences, their cultural ways of knowing, understanding, and existing in the world. It is important not to assume this means there is only one such way that Samoans exist, process and view the world. This approach instead aims to protect Samoan audiences and fāgogo from exploitation, manipulation, and from exchanges that soli le vā, digital faifāgogo should be guided by principles of vā tapuia, vā fealoa’i and alofa fetufaa’i.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the nature by which people conduct themselves and negotiate the *vā* may be distinctly different online from an exchange in person. Although digital frameworks are utilised in this research as a tool for bridging connection, it can behave, paradoxically, as a barrier at the same time, particularly for audiences without access to, or education in, digital technologies. For generations of Samoans growing up as digital natives, a practice of digital *fāgogo* among children may bring the opportunity for Samoan communities to establish their own digital etiquette, conduct and ethics in pursuit of *vā tapuia* extending into digital social spaces.

Digital interactive frameworks harnessing *fāgogo* for the investigation and reconciliation of cultural identity might follow the sequence described in Afamasaga's training program for secondary teachers that enlist holistic cultural models (personal communication, April 12, 2016). This would recommend a framework that:

1. champions the value of lived stories and knowledge people already possess, empowering them to be their own researchers, custodians and practitioners of knowledge;
2. provides platforms for practitioners or *tufuga* (cultural experts) to demonstrate their knowledge in a practical way;
3. integrates multi-disciplinary skills, everyday life and knowledge in the stories to be shared;
4. blends disciplines such as storytelling, song and dance, knowledge and skills of "lived" material culture, and a creative component wherein the accumulated teachings are then transformed into some manner of output such as creative writing; and

5. holds the following tenets at the core of content design: the nature and construction of knowledge (epistemology) with the interrogation of our environments and ways of being (ontology), and the spiritual nature of the world (theology).

Afamasaga has credited the success of her program to its synthesis of different disciplines in a mode of holistic learning tying each component back to its role and utility in everyday life of the students: a framework for sociocultural nurturance. The program empowered Samoan students to recognise the value of their language, oral legacy, traditions, and every day "material" culture.

## Future recommendations

### Future narratives

The digital media studied in this research focused on narratives set in the past or the present for Samoan communities. However, there is a dearth of speculative digital fāgogo that consider the future projection of the Samoan people. In the consideration not only of the people we have been, and presently are, it would be a welcome contribution to see digital fāgogo that also speculate on the nature of people we could be in the future.

### Trials with remote A'oga Amata

In resonance with its historical application among young children, early digital fāgogo pilots might consider trialling digital storytelling projects with a'oga amata (Samoan early childhood education) centres. Fāgogo can serve as a language learning resource by the provision of fāgogo resources in bilingual terms. Emma Kruse Va'ai points to New Zealand's former arrangement with Samoa and the provision of free *School Journals*, demonstrating that foreign nursery rhymes and folk tales were brought into Samoa to help young children

learn the English language (personal communication, April 7, 2016). Although there are many pedagogical and logistical considerations warranting attention with such an initiative, a digital fāgogo could emulate and extend this objective for a’oga amata centres that are not in a culturally immersive environment, or seeking to connect with other centres to combine their collective fāgogo intelligence.

#### Research into Samoan digital cultures in Aotearoa

Samoans appear to favour digital social spaces that nurture a digital orality, are audio-visual, and facilitate conversations. More research is required to understand how Samoan audiences are using their favoured digital social spaces such as *Facebook*, *Instagram* and *YouTube*. *Snapchat* is another mode worthy of further study as I have observed its high usage among youth in Aotearoa, including Samoans. However, the ephemeral nature of its media, and peer-to-peer and peer-to-subscribers framework, would suggest different behaviour and usage patterns than platforms such as *Facebook* support with its peer-to-community structure.

#### Research into Culturally-Responsible Business Models

Questions of exploitation, manipulation and remuneration are of particular interest. If a digital fāgogo (or fāgogo model) should be developed with an interest in earning remuneration, it would be a challenging, but worthy pursuit to negotiate among the Samoan community what such a business model could look like. This is particularly relevant and sensitive to fāgogo that are considered measina by a village or family.

#### Final Remarks

As Kolone-Collins remarked in her thesis, the focus of her study lay in the power of fāgogo to reach the heart and soul of the children (2010, p. 98). In contemporary times and among

diasporic audiences, I have found that it is also more than children yearning to know their cultural heritage, to connect with other Samoans and nurture these questions of who they are and might still be. For Samoan communities distributed around the globe, finding fāgogo to nurture their understanding of Samoan identity and culture is difficult. This research does not claim to supplant or supersede historical fāgogo practices, but to supplement them in communities such as these. This research recognises the co-habitation of our communities in digital social spaces, and recognises the growing hunger and sophistication of our Samoan audiences when exposed to diverse media and storytelling opportunities. I challenge our communities to continue claiming these spaces and experimenting with new tools, techniques and technologies in ways that are meaningful to us.

It is my intention that these principles for a digital fāgogo practice will likewise serve as a meaningful point of departure for a generation of ‘digital natives’ or seasoned faifāgogo who question how digital, online technologies may support their storytelling.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Guidelines for talanoaga with participants

The following sample questions were approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 4 April 2016, AUTEK Reference number 16/31. It should be noted that while the guidelines mention ‘traditional fāgogo’, the language was later changed in the thesis to specify historical or formational fāgogo.

- a. Function: An investigation of cultural nurturance (Tupua, 2003) and a site of social reflection
  - i. Historical values, *e.g.*
    1. *For production members: What culturally-specific historical values informed the design of your project? Why these, and how?*
    2. *For scholars: What culturally-specific historical values do you expect to survive in contemporary fāgogo, and why?*
  - ii. Belief, moral tales, and social convention, *e.g.*
    1. *For production members: The traditional fāgogo often served a social function to comment on events, concerns, or behaviours of the day, and suggest a way forward. What Samoan beliefs, moral tales, or social conventions were prioritised in this project, and why?*
    2. *For scholars: What are the most distinct changes you’ve observed of the kind of cautionary tales in contemporary Samoan literature, and the way we tell them? What about the beliefs or social conventions we’re passing on through our stories?*
  - iii. Language, *e.g.*
    1. *For production members: How did you decide when to feature languages other than English in your project, and why at those points?*
    2. *For scholars: Language survival and revival have been firmly established as a key mode through which indigenous cultures pass on their systems of understanding and beliefs. This provides a unique, inter-generational exchange of knowledge. What opportunities can you suggest for digital storytelling to support this?*
- b. Form: An investigation of storytelling strategy and technique
  - i. Making *theCoconet.TV* and *the Factory Story* a participatory mode of storytelling:
    1. *For production members: What have been the main lessons learned about the way this project was designed to allow audiences to participate? What*



*would you do differently next time? What do Samoan or Pacific online storytellers still need to learn?*

2. *For scholars: Traditional fāgogo and much of the contemporary Samoan literature enlists a one-to-many approach of storytelling, but also emphasise a storyteller's ability to respond to their audience; a lived experience; a style and character of storytelling that is improvisational and constantly changing. If everyone can be both an audience member and storyteller in networked, digital media, what challenges or opportunities do you foresee for the ways Samoans are used to engaging with stories?*

ii. The place of proverb, poetry, song, myth and legend (tala o le vavau), e.g.

1. *For production members: What was the role of Samoan proverb, poetry, song or myth in your project?*
2. *For scholars: Who or what do you see as the bastions of Samoan proverb, poetry, song, and myth in contemporary storytelling? Which of these is surviving the strongest to date, and what can we suggest as to why?*

iii. The pursuit of immersion and intimacy

1. *For production members: How did you design the structure or content of your project to be immersive, and provide your audience intimacy with the experience? What do these terms mean for Samoan or Pacific online, networked storytelling?*
2. *For scholars: Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop suggested that many first generation Samoan writers wrote in pursuit of emulating the fāgogo experience of their youth. How can a generation unexposed to that traditional form and practice achieve the immersion and intimacy in the stories they tell? Where do we see the principles of fāgogo in the contemporary structure and art of works manifesting today?*

Appendix B: A comparative matrix analysis of digital media

The following matrix compares the key features of historical and contemporary narratives and principles across all digital artefacts of this research.

	Historical fāgogo framework				Contemporary fāgogo framework		Originally produced		Media elements available online								
	Narrative	Principles			Narrative	Principles	Offline	Online	Oral			Written	Image (still)		Image (moving)		Other
		Oral	Space for negotiation	Socioculturally didactic					Story	Chant	Song		Animated	Live action	Animated	Live action	
Digitising the historical fagogo																	
Fagogo. Fables from Samoa.	x	x		x			x		x	x	x	Transcription					
Myths and Legends of Ancient Samoa   NZETC	x			x			x					Transcription					
Contemporising the historical fagogo																	
Ray of Sounds project (Gagana Samoa)	x	x		x			x		x	x	x		x				
The Legend of Sina and the Eel (by Victoria University of Wellington)	x	x	Email	x				x				Transcription with translation on mouse-over				x	
TheCoconet.TV	x	x	YouTube, FB Comment Plug-In	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	Various	x	x	x	x	Interactive timeline
The Legend of Sina and the Eel (by G56 Creative)	x	x	YouTube	x				x	x						x		
Legend of the Cannibal King	x	x	YouTube, FB Comment Plug-In	x	x			x	x			Text overlay			x	x	
Sau Fuga Sina	x	x	YouTube, FB Comment Plug-In	x				x			x	Samoan subtitles				x	
Surfing for Sina	x		FB Comment Plug-In	?	x	x		x	x			Short story	x	x			
Malaga	?	x	YouTube, FB Comment Plug-In	x	x		x		x			English subtitles				x	
Adapting foreign fagogo																	
Island Time (x4)		x	YouTube	x	x		x		x							x	
Digital contemporary fagogo																	
Faitotoa o le Alofa		x	x	x	x	x		x	x							x	
The Factory Story		x	Webpage (comment function on all pages); Facebook page with weekly post per episode and	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	Webpage character profiles,	Branding	Episode-specific memes,		x	

			interim meme content; Twitter profile (primarily reblog of FB content); YouTube video archive									character blog posts per episode		character profiles			
Baby Mama's Club		x	x	x	x	x		x	x			Media overlay of sms messages		Character profiles		x	Livestream
FRESH Housewives of South Auckland		x	x	x	x	x		x	x							x	
Memes #SamoanProblems, Quotes & Sayings			x	x	x	x		x				Caption		x			

## GLOSSARY of KEY PHRASES

The following section describes key phrases used within this research.

**Contemporary fāgogo content:** Contemporary narratives that do not function as an explanatory point of origin for an aspect of Samoan culture, but as reflections, commentary or speculation of life. These fāgogo may or may not include reference to Samoa's indigenous oral history and fāgogo techniques of lagi, solo and tagi. Within the scope of this research<sup>26</sup>, these fāgogo reflect the postcolonial contexts of Samoans in the diaspora, and their reconciliation with the culture(s) of their contemporary environments.

**Contemporary fāgogo principles:** Emerging uses of digital media that are not indigenous to Samoa, but reflect indigenisation and appropriation of such media and their frameworks in service of fāgogo's historical principles.

**Digital Fāgogo:** Fāgogo designed natively within and for the digital, networked environment to fulfil historically formational fāgogo principles.

**Fāgogo:** the historically oral means and method of nurturing Samoan cultural identity through storytelling. These stories were historically interlaced with song, chant, poetry, and delivered at night by elders or parents for young children. The scope of these stories was intertextual by nature, and could include creative work (tala fatu), stories handed down between generations (tala tu'u), Bible stories (tala Tusi Paia), and myths and legends.

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<sup>26</sup> It is possible for non-traditional fāgogo content to be defined within the indigenous context of Samoa. This might include narratives written or produced by Samoans, still residing in Samoa, that do not make explicit reference to the indigenous oral traditions, i.e. creative writing that takes its cultural cues exclusively from Western narratives.

**Historical / Formational fāgogo content:** Historical narratives established in the indigenous Samoan oral traditions prior to the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1830 (Dunlop, 1986, p. 43). These fāgogo (e.g. the Turtle and the Shark, Sina and the Eel) provide the origin story for aspects of Samoan culture including physical land formations, village organisations, social practices and mores, philosophical beliefs, historical events, and people. These fāgogo are likely to include or be delivered entirely in lagi (songs), solo (poems) and/or tagi (chant).

**Historical / Formational fāgogo principles:** Fāgogo is delivered in-person, orally, with the objective of imparting some information to nurture a person's sociocultural wellbeing. The faifāgogo and audience agree how the story will be delivered (with prompt to continue, or to continue without prompt until the end), the audience and the faifāgogo have the opportunity to react and adjust to each other and the story as it is being told, and an opportunity is provided at the end to collectively reflect on the understanding and meaning. Fāgogo is highly dynamic and experimental in its narrative material, tools and techniques. It may borrow from other stories or be a rendition of an existing story.

**Participatory production:** Projects that are produced with the collaborative participation of the community who are the subjects or target audience of the project. Participatory productions provide these communities with key decision-making power in determining a project's priorities and principles. Such productions will ensure that community collaborators are engaged and informed throughout the entire production process, in order to exercise their agency.

**Sociocultural nurturance:** Social actions, techniques or processes designed to nurture a person's holistic wellbeing, including (but not limited to) the spiritual, emotional, physical, mental and cultural aspects of their person.

**Su'i fefiloi (v.):** The action or method of combining a variety of different materials, tools or techniques in storytelling.

**Su'ifefiloi (n.):** An object, story or outcome of the Su'i fefiloi storytelling method.

**Transmedia storytelling:** Storytelling that enlists principles observed by Henry Jenkins (2006, 2009a, 2009b) that often tells a story across a variety of media systems and delivery platforms in coherence or “synergy” (Pratten, 2011).

## GLOSSARY of GAGANA SAMOA

The following glossary is ordered by the Samoan alphabet and informed by the following resource: Malua Institution. (1977). *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press. Where terms have multiple meanings within the native language, the translation relevant to this research is provided.

<i><b>Samoan</b></i>	<i><b>English</b></i>
Ai kae	A Samoan curse, swear phrase.
Aitu	Spirit
A'oga amata	Samoan school for early childhood education
'Aue!	An interjection, such as "Alas! Oh!"
'Aumaga	The general order of young untitled men in a village
Aualuma	The unmarried women in a village
Autalavou	Samoan youth
Afatasi / Afakasi	A person of mixed Samoan heritage
Āgaifanua	The customs and protocols and customs of a village
Āganu'u	The customs and protocols of Samoa
Alaga'upu	Proverbs
Aleipata	A district of villages on the island of Upolu
Ali'i	A Samoan high chief
Alofa	Love, compassion, gift, blessing
Alofa fetufaa'i	Reciprocity
Asau	A village on the island of Savai'i
Atua	A god or God
E mau 'ese'ese Samoa	Each Samoan has their own beliefs and opinions (even in village stories) when it comes to understanding or practice regarding the originality of issues regarding fāgogo, faalupega, etc, all that relate to faasamoa.
Fa'aaloalo	Respect, respectful behaviour
Fa'afailelega	Nourishment
Fa'agogo	The way of the Gogosina
Fa'alupega	Naming titles and honorifics of a village
Fa'asamoa	The Samoan way of life; Samoan culture
Faifāgogo	Storyteller, the one who conveys the fāgogo
Faife'au	A church minister
Faitoto'a	Door

<b><i>Samoan</i></b>	<b><i>English</i></b>
Fautasi	Long boat
Fafaga gogo	Feed like the gogo
Fāgogo / Fāgono	Samoa stories historically interlaced with song, chant, poetry, and delivered at night
Fāgogo tu'utaliga	Fāgogo delivered by spoken word
Fala	Mat
Fale	House
Faleaitu / Faleaiku	House of spirits, a historical Samoan style of satirical performance
Faletua	The title for the wife of a minister or ali'i / high chief
Fanau	Children
Fe'au	Chores, errands
Feagaiga	Covenant, agreement
Fesili	A question
Fiafia	Happiness, celebration
Finagalo	Opinion or response
Gafa	Family genealogy
Gagana	Language
Gogo	Short form of 'gogosina'
Gogosina	The white tern, a small seabird
Koniseki	Transliteration of 'concert'
Lagi	Song
Lagi solo	Sung poetry
Lalomanu	A village in Upolu
Lavalava	A generic term for a common type of Samoan clothing wrap that is worn in place of pants.
Loa	Long
Logo Tutuila	"Listen like Tutuila"
Lufilufi	A Samoan village in Upolu
Mauga	Mountain
Malae	The communal open ceremonial space or field in a village
Malaga	Journey
Mālie	Deep satisfaction, joy
Malosi	Strong, strength
Mata o le Alelo	Eyes of the 'Bastard' (a Samoan curse or swear word)
Matai	A Samoan chief or titled person
Matua	Elder(s), parents
Mea'alofa	Gift
Measina	Sacred treasure of cultural heritage
Metotia	Skills



<b><i>Samoan</i></b>	<b><i>English</i></b>
Moata'a	A village on the island of Upolu.
Muagagana	A proverb or proverbial expression
Muamua	First
(Pa)palagi	A Caucasian person
Penina	Pearl
Sau Fuga Sina	"Come, sister Sina"
Sauai	Giant
Safune	A district of village on the island of Savai'i
Savai'i	The largest island in Samoa
Siapo	A fine cloth made from the bark of the Mulberry tree
Solo	Poetry
Su'i fefiloi	A mixture of different things
Sufi	To negotiate
Sufiga	Negotiating or deliberating of opinions
Tautua	Service
Tāgāti'a	A game where the ti'a, a small javelin from the branch of the moso'oi tree, is thrown like a slingshot
Tagaloa	Short form of 'Tagaloaalelagi'
Tagaloaalelagi / Tagaloailelagi	"Tagaloa in Heaven" the indigenous name of Samoa's creator God
Tagata o le moana	People of the Pacific Ocean; Pacific Island people
Tagi	Chant
Tala	The generic term for 'story'
Tala o le vavau	"Timeless stories", "Stories of forever", Myths and legends
Tala fatu	Creative stories
Tala Tusi Paia	Stories from the Bible
Tala tu'u	Stories that have been passed down from one generation to the next
Talanoa	Conversation or talking
Talanoaga	The outcomes of conversation, the conversation itself
Tamaligi	A type of tree
Tapu	Something that is sacred or taboo
Teu le Vā	Nurture the space or relationship
Tu ma aga	Behaviour
Tuā'oi	Land boundary / border
Tufuga	Indigenous expert in a particular craft or discipline
Tulafale	Orator, talking chief
Tutuila	An island of American Samoa
Upolu	The second largest island of Samoa

<b><i>Samoan</i></b>	<b><i>English</i></b>
Upu	Word
Upu fa'aaloalo	A respect style of speech
Va'a	Boat
Vā	Space, relationship
Vā fealoa'i	The mutual understanding and respect observed between people
Vā tapuia	The understanding and sacred space that must be recognised and fostered in all relations between people and their environment

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